THE MIDDLE PASTURE

MATHILDE BILBRO

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The day before Katherine was married, they were all at our house for dinner—Katherine like a rose with the dew on.

See page 323

THE MIDDLE PASTURE

BY

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The day before Katherine was married, they were all at our house for dinner. . . . Katherine like a rose with the dew on. *See page* 323 . . *Frontispiece*

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THE MIDDLE PASTURE

THE MIDDLE PASTURE

CHAPTER I

The Middle Pasture

Father was raving, tearing mad because somebody had poisoned our dog, Ben. He was using language, I can tell you, about what he meant to do when he found out who did it — and Aunt Em and Aunt Sally were trying to see who could talk the fastest saying who they thought did it.

"If I knew who the wretch was I'd break his neck," said father very quietly, and all white in the face. He was always like that when he was mad. Uncle George would slam things and holler at people, but father just turned white, and talked very low — and you got out of the way.

I decided to go and sit on the rocks in the Middle Pasture, because I knew that after a while he would be looking for the Sunday paper, as it was only Monday and he had n't read it all. And now he never would read it all, for Billy and I had used four sheets of it making a kite that very morning. We did n't notice the date until it was too late; and so, in the humor father was in, I thought I'd rather not be there when he missed those sheets.

Ben was lying on a straw bed in the barn, doing as

well as could be expected. Father and Aunt Sally, and Aunt Em, and Eli had worked on him all the morning until Dr. Haines came, and after a while the doctor said he thought Ben might pull through, although he had swallowed enough poison to kill any ordinary dog.

But Ben was n't an ordinary dog; he was nearly human. He understood everything you said to him, and did everything Billy told him to do. He always barked at niggers and tramps, and though he never bit anybody, he made it very plain that when people came to our house after dark they could n't pass the little gate, or the back steps, or the barn door without explaining to him who they were. And he usually did all the explaining himself by sniffing at them. Then he would generally wag his tail and walk off.

Everybody in Pine Grove knew Ben, and it was a mystery who could have poisoned him. But he was certainly poisoned on purpose, for there on the ground was part of the meat with strychnine on it, when Aunt Sally heard him whining and found him lying behind the hedge.

Aunt Em said she knew it must be tramps or burglars, and they 'd soon be robbing the house. Aunt Sally said it was more likely some low-down nigger trying to get a chance to steal chickens. Being a darkey herself, she understands their ways.

Of course I know that "nigger" is wrong, and you really spell it n–e–g–r–o. You can't live to be twelve years old and spell down everybody in your class — if I do say it myself — and not know that. But most people about here say "nigger." Even father does sometimes,

and everybody else — except Miss Williams — and of course school-teachers are expected to say things just right.

After all of them had left the barn but Billy and myself, I thought about the Sunday paper, and told Billy to come on and let 's go to the Pasture. But at first he would n't leave Ben. He sat right by him, and kept sniffling and rubbing Ben's paws and stroking his head. He had cried until his eyes were puffed up and red. Billy has always cried more than I have — and he 's a year older too. But, anyway, he 's a real manly boy, and this was the first time he had cried since I stuck a nail in my foot. Instead of crying I get all dry and hot inside, and something hurts in my throat, and I feel like I am going to explode. So Billy did the crying when I hurt myself, or got spanked, or anything like that — or at least he used to; he 's getting too big for that now. I was as sorry about Ben as he was, but Dr. Haines had said just to leave him quiet and after a few hours he would be better, and he had told father what to do for him — so I did n't see any use in our staying in the barn when it was April, and everything was so lovely out in the Pasture. And besides, there was father and the Sunday paper. When I mentioned that part of it to Billy he decided that after all, he 'd better go, too.

But he was contrary as anything, and not sociable at all. When we reached the Middle Pasture and I wanted to climb on the rocks, he wanted to wade in the Branch. I told him the water was too cold yet for Mary and Carey. They 'd be sure to come over if they saw us, and

if I went in the Branch, they 'd go in too — and all of us knew that Aunt Lou would certainly switch them if they took off their shoes and stockings before the first day of May. She did it every year. Billy only said "Rats!" and went on down to the Branch by himself.

So I climbed to the very top point of the rocks where a little clump of cedars grew right up out of a sort of crack, and you wondered what on earth they lived on. The rock-pile was all full of little pines and cedars growing out of cracks. Under the clump at the top there was a smooth, flat place, thick and soft with needles, and very shady, where you could sit with your back against a tree, and see a long way in every direction. It was a favorite place of mine; I loved to go there to think my stories out.

But that day I did n't care so much about thinking stories; it was interesting just to lie there and look about, and not think at all. I was glad Billy did n't come, and I hoped Mary and Carey would n't, because I did n't want to play, or be bothered with children.

First of all I suppose I ought to tell about the Middle Pasture — but there is so much to tell, that you hardly know how to begin. I don't believe there ever was a place just like that Pasture — I mean a place with so many interesting things to it. I know there is n't in Pine Grove. It is a narrow strip of land, nearly a mile long, and a quarter of a mile wide, and it lies right between our place and Uncle George's — and just here I might explain how that strip of land is the reason why father and Uncle George have n't spoken to each other,

except to quarrel, since — oh well, long before Billy and I and the twins were born!

But first I 'd rather tell about the things in the Pasture, and what you could see from the rocks. If you look straight ahead of you, way off lies the Big Road. On the left is our place, and on the right is Uncle George's.

Our place is called the Old Crawford Place because it was built by father's grandfather. It is of red brick, and very old-fashioned, and two stories and a half high; but from the rocks in the Pasture you can just see the chimney-tops and a bit of the peaked roof, because there are so many big oaks and elms and magnolias clustered around it.

Uncle George's house is different. There are not so many trees near it, and it is so big and white that it shows plainly from any direction. From the rocks you can look across the Pasture and see the back porch and the yards. People call Uncle George's the New Crawford Place, and heaven only knows why, when it was built twenty-five years ago, when Uncle George and Aunt Lou were married. At first it was just a cottage. Grandfather built it and gave it to them, and lots and lots of acres of land and cash money besides, for Uncle George's share of the estate. He gave father the Old Place, and it might seem as if he had given father the most — only the land around the Old Place had been used so long that it was not so rich as Uncle George's land, and besides he gave Uncle George money enough to make things even — and so father and Uncle George were satisfied about everything except the Middle Pasture.

Aunt Em called Uncle George a very up-and-coming man, and being that way, he had built another story to his house, and added wings and things, and a big porch with tall columns across the front, until now, next to ours, it was the finest house in Pine Grove.

Carey said it was THE finest — but I set her right about that. I just reminded her of how much it cost great-grandfather Crawford to build the Old Place, and how lots of the inside finishing came from England — and told her about the marble mantelpiece in the parlor, and the long mirror built right in the wall, and the mahogany banister coming down the stairs and making a beautiful curve, and so shiny you could see your face in it, and so broad and smooth you could slide all the way down from the attic to the front door without fear of a splinter or a sharp edge. Then she could n't say a thing, for Mary told me herself that their banister was sharp at the edges, and you could n't slide down it with any pleasure at all.

Of course we did n't know about each other's houses, because Uncle George never had let Mary and Carey set a foot in our house, and father had never let Billy and me go over there. The only places we could ever be together were at Sunday-school, and in the Pasture, and Sunday-school did n't count much, because just as quick as ever it was over Uncle George would take the twins and drive them home in his surrey. We have a surrey, too, but Billy and I have always had to walk, unless it rains, for father does n't believe in coddling children.

Billy and I went to the Pine Grove School, but the twins did n't. Aunt Lou said such common people sent their children there, so Katherine had to teach them at home — which was hard on Katherine, for Mary especially is not any too bright. Aunt Em says she is too much like her mother to be that.

So the Middle Pasture was our place to play and get acquainted. Father and Uncle George had it wire-fenced in at both ends, where it touches the road, and neither one would consent for the other one to use it, because both of them claimed it. So, for years and years it had n't been used, and of course it was overgrown with little trees, and grasses, and blackberry and plum thickets, and snakes, until it was a perfect wilderness. It might be a failure as a pasture, but as a place to play it was a dandy success. One end of it faces the Big Road, our places are on each side, and the other end — the north end — faces on the Old Meadow Road. Grandfather Crawford named that road a long time ago when it simply was a path leading off to his wood-lots. Now there are houses and little farms along the Old Meadow Road, and on past Uncle George's place it leads right into Pine Grove, and stops behind the Baptist Church.

It is hard to tell what thing about the Pasture I love best. There 's the line of wire fence running along the Big Road. That fence is five feet high, and so covered with wild roses and honeysuckle vines, and morning-glories, that it makes a thick, solid hedge — and nobody would believe the number of birds there are in that hedge all the summer! One day we counted twelve nests.

On our side there 's an old stone wall, about as tall as I am, and most of it is covered with ivy. In one place where a dead tree-trunk stands close to the wall the ivy runs up and covers the tree. That is where Grouchy lives. Grouchy is a big owl; for a long time only Billy and I knew about him, for we did n't dare to tell the twins. I did n't so much mind telling Carey, but I was afraid she 'd tell Mary, and as Mary tells Aunt Lou everything, and Aunt Lou tells Uncle George everything, I knew it would all be up the spout with Grouchy, on account of Uncle George's little chickens.

Just opposite our barn there 's a gap in the wall where there used to be a bar-gate when grandfather's stock passed in and out of the Pasture. On Uncle George's side is a gap just like it in his wall, but both of these gaps were boarded and nailed up. Billy and I could get into the Pasture by climbing over our wall just anywhere — out of sight of father and Aunt Em — but Mary and Carey had to get in by squeezing between two bars in their nailed-up gate. Three years back, when father and Uncle George found that we were in the habit of meeting in the Pasture and playing there, they made a row about it, and every one of us got switched. But when they found that we kept right on going there, and playing together every chance we had, they just left us alone and made believe they did n't know.

If you started at the front end of the Pasture and walked straight back, you first came to a big thicket of plum trees, and one side was grown over with a grapevine, so of course underneath it was as shady as a church.

When I was young, that was my doll-house during the summer, and when it rained I shut my dolls up in an old tin bread-box Aunt Sally gave me. They had now been shut up in that box at least four weeks since I had touched them. People going on thirteen have something to think of besides dolls. Mary and Carey nearly always brought theirs over, but they are only eleven.

After you pass the thicket, there are rocks lying all about in the grass, and a great many little new cedars and oaks and pines coming up everywhere, and in the spring and early summer I know you would n't find as many different kinds of wild flowers anywhere as there are right there — violets, and honeysuckle, and yellow-jasmine, and dogwood, and tiny pink flowers, and tall blue ones, and red sumach — and later on there 'd be blackberries and plums, more than you could possibly eat. As you go on down the Pasture, the rocks get bigger, and then you begin to go up-hill, and the next thing you know you 've come to a great pile of rocks that goes up forty odd feet I 've heard father say, and right on top is the cedar clump, and the nice shady place to sit. On the north side the pile slopes down again, and then after a little space you come to the two big chestnut trees that are said to be the very biggest trees in all Pine Grove. The limbs come nearly down to the ground and they make a shady spot as big around as a circus-tent. I guess that 's where grandfather's cows used to lie when the Pasture was a real pasture, and there was n't any quarrel in the family.

Under these trees runs the Branch; gracious only

knows where it starts, but I mean to find out some day. Anyway it cuts across the Old Meadow Road, runs through a corner of our North Orchard, and comes right into the Middle Pasture through a gap in the wall. Then it spreads out and runs under the limbs of the big chestnuts, and on across the Pasture, and under Uncle George's wall into his horse-lot, and then it turns and goes under the back fence into the Old Meadow Road again, and twists in and out of Pine Grove until it finally ends in Sam Wilbur's mill-pond. When it is dry and hot the Branch is only an inch or two deep, but after a rain it 's all of a foot in places. There 's a deep little pool under a tree where I used to drown George and Louisa when I was mad with the twins, and how they would howl! George and Louisa were little china-all-over dolls, and I had them named for Uncle George and Aunt Lou. Once Billy broke off one of George's feet, and said he was doing it to give Uncle George a pain, and Mary and Carey cried until I had to give them four buckeyes, and two of my best doll ribbons. You have to handle Mary and Carey like eggs. But of course all that was when we were younger.

After hot weather came there were so many ways to play in the water that we never got tired of the Branch. Where there 's water you can fish for minnows, wade, make frog-houses in the mud, or just sit on the bank, and hang your feet over, while the water runs through your toes.

Next to the Branch the best thing about the Pasture was the Cave. It was n't exactly a cave either, but the

high rock mound, instead of sloping down on the side next our place, ended straight up and down like a precipice, and curved inward, and the trees grew close around, making a cool, dark place that the sun never came into. A big crack split the rock from the ground up about as high as we could reach, where it ran together again. We could n't see anything on the other side, and the crack was n't wide enough to put your hand in, but we would pretend there was a dungeon inside, and play there were prisoners shut up there. We named this place "The Pirates' Den" after a book Johnny Wilbur lent Billy.

But, going back to the Branch, on the other side lies a smooth, green meadow with a tree here and there, and not so many rocks; it was a fine place for running-games like Prisoner's Base and Tag. And 'way up at the north end is the other wire fence facing on the Old Meadow Road. That fence, also, is grown over with vines, but there 's a little cut-under place where we could crawl through to get into the road, and from the big chestnuts to the north hedge we wore a clean path through the grass making a short cut going to Miss Harriet's.

It takes too much time to tell all the things about the Pasture, but you can see for yourself why we four children liked to play there; and that afternoon as I sat under the cedar clump, and the smell of the apple blossoms drifted over from the orchard, and the house-tops peeped through the tall trees over Pine Grove, I felt as if I was just looking down on the whole world, and all the world was beautiful.

CHAPTER II

Various People and a Ghost

There never was anybody on earth who did n't look more like an old maid than Miss Harriet did; and yet she had been one for over twenty years, for she 'd tell you herself that she was forty-eight, and everybody knows that if you are not married when you are twenty, you begin to be an old maid, and you 'd better hurry up.

But Miss Harriet is what I call real pretty. First of all, her hair, with only a little gray in it, is curly, and no matter how she brushes it back, it is always making little rings; and then she has nice white teeth, and she laughs at everything and makes you laugh, too, unless it 's something serious — then she does n't laugh at all, and she tells you just exactly what is the best thing to do.

The best thing is usually to go and tell your father, and then you stand a chance of getting switched or sent to bed; but at least you get it off your mind. No matter what you 've done or how bad you feel when you go to see Miss Harriet, you come away feeling all right, or better anyway. She 's just that kind of person.

Her house is on the other side of the Old Meadow Road, exactly opposite the place we crawl through under the Pasture hedge. It is a very little house, old and gray, as if it had never been painted, and only one room

in width. First there is a tiny porch, covered with honeysuckle, then there 's the front room, which is both the sitting-room and the place where Miss Harriet keeps her millinery — she trims hats for a business; back of the front room is her bedroom; and back of the bedroom is her dining-room and kitchen all in one — and every inch of that little house is as neat as a pin.

She has flowers and plants all around the house, and in the back is a place for her garden and chickens. She does n't have a cow because father always sends her milk and butter, and in return she trims Aunt Em's hats and mine.

At this time Miss Harriet did n't get a lot of hats to trim, because a good many Pine Grove people thought that Pauline Finley was a more stylish trimmer.

Pauline lived two years in St. Louis and now she had a little shop back of Bennet's drug-store. She trimmed very well, but I liked Miss Harriet's hats better than I did Pauline's.

Everybody likes Miss Harriet whether she trims their hats or not. Father says she is the only person he ever knew who could get along well with just everybody and who never had a single enemy. Aunt Em said the reason why was because Miss Harriet felt so kindly to people that people just had to feel kindly to her. Aunt Lou had Pauline to trim her hats and the twins' after she came back from St. Louis, but Katherine kept right on taking hers to Miss Harriet.

I liked Katherine better than any of Uncle George's family — I only knew Uncle George and Aunt Lou by

hearing people talk of them. Whenever Aunt Lou saw Billy and me she had a sort of sickish look, as if she smelt something bad; but Katherine was always nice and pleasant whenever she had a chance to be, which was n't often, for every one of them, from Aunt Lou down, was scared of Uncle George.

Katherine was engaged to Selmer Bennet, and I thought it was high time they were marrying, for she was nearly twenty-three, and that 's certainly getting along. I asked her about it one day when we were all over to Miss Harriet's, watching her trim Katherine's spring hat. I asked her if she was going to marry in the summer, and she laughed and said, "Goodness! No!" and she did n't blush a bit. Miss Harriet punched me behind the shoulder, as a sign to hush, but I wanted to know, so I said to Katherine if I was in her place I 'd hurry Selmer up. But she only laughed again and said she was in no hurry herself. The idea! when she was nearly twenty-three!

Father called Selmer the Town Model, but for all that I knew he did n't like Selmer, because he always has some pretty name for people he does n't like and says awfully nice things about them. Sometimes when he would be so mad with Billy and me he could hardly keep his hands off of us, he would say to Aunt Em, "Send those precious angels out!"

Billy said he could n't see why father called us angels when he was mad, but somehow I knew how he meant it, and so when he called Selmer the Town Model, I knew he did n't like Selmer at all. I did n't like him

either, but I did n't know why, unless it was because his eyes were too round and his mouth was too small.

On that afternoon when Ben was sick, after I grew tired of lying under the cedars, I went down to the Branch to join Billy, but he had gone; so I ran across the Pasture, climbed under the hedge, and went over to see Miss Harriet. She was busy watering her flowers, and she let me help her, as she often did.

Just as I was holding the shower can over a bed of pinks close to the fence, somebody called out,

"What an industrious young lady!"

I looked around quickly, and it was Selmer Bennet in his new buggy, taking Katherine to ride. Katherine looked like she always does, pretty as a flower; and Selmer was dressed up in his usual dandyish way, in a linen suit, with his socks and tie and shirt all matching each other and all silk. They stopped and talked to Miss Harriet a few minutes and then drove on.

"Miss Harriet, do you like him?" I asked her suddenly.

She looked at me in a surprised way and said,

"Who? Selmer? Why — why he 's a very nice young man."

But she had n't answered my question.

"Do you want Katherine to marry him?" I then asked her, for I wanted to know what she thought about it.

But she said good gracious, what funny questions I asked! And Selmer was considered the best behaved young man in Pine Grove, and that he was thrifty and

money-making, and did n't drink, nor smoke, and she hoped he would make Katherine happy. So I just told her that when I grew up, the man I would be engaged to could drink, and smoke, and chew, and use language, and do anything he pleased, so long as he was just not like Selmer Bennet, because there was something about Selmer that gave me the stand-offs.

Miss Harriet looked at me in the queerest way and said I must always try to like people, and if I would study them well enough I 'd always find something to like about every single person I met, and to run right along to the back porch and bring her the clipping scissors and her garden gloves. So I did n't say anything more about Selmer, but I felt just the same way about him.

When I don't like people they always give me the stand-offs; I mean by that, I have a feeling as if I want to be somewhere else, and I can't think of a thing to say to them. But when father has to be with someone he does n't like, he gets the budges; he will very suddenly cross or uncross his legs, or his foot will fly out, or he begins to drum on something with his fingers. That 's the difference between father and me.

Once I heard father tell Aunt Em that Selmer was a conceited fool and tight-fisted, and the reason Aunt Lou was encouraging Katherine to marry him was because he was going to inherit property and was very keen about money matters. " He 's a perfect sharper," said father. And Aunt Em said Selmer was exactly like his father, and what else could you expect of him?

Old man Bennet and Selmer lived by themselves in a tall narrow house next to the drug-store. Mr. Bennet was said to be rich, but he was peculiar, and no one knew him well; he did n't go about much, though he sometimes came to see father and Aunt Em.

Selmer kept the drug-store and the post-office, which were all in one, for Pine Grove is only a little town. Aunt Lou calls it a village, but that 's because her people, the Dixons, live in Bradford, and Bradford is quite a big city. In the afternoons everybody goes to the drug-store to get soda-water and ice-cream and to ask for their mail. If you want to see anybody in Pine Grove, all you have to do is to go to the drug-store and wait long enough.

When I left Miss Harriet's and reached home that afternoon, it was nearly time for supper, and Doctor Willingham and his wife were just leaving. Billy and I always called him simply "Doctor," and we like him better than almost anyone we know. You can tell him things, and he always understands.

I liked to be around when he was at our house, but he could n't visit much because he was crippled and it was too much trouble to Mrs. Willingham to be helping him about. He only had one leg, and his back was not strong; things made him tired very easily. You see he was hurt in a railroad accident years ago, so he laughs and calls himself "a piece of a man." Billy and I used to be always wishing that Mrs. Willingham could give him some of her health and strength, and Billy said he would n't care a bit if it had been her leg instead of Doc-

tor's that the train had cut off. We did n't like her; she was always talking about how hard she worked waiting on Doctor — and she did it right before him. He would n't say anything, but there would be a look in his eyes that said he was sorry for being a cripple, but he did n't know how to help it. And Billy and I would get furious and say we hated Mrs. Willingham.

As I came up she was helping Doctor into their wide-seated, low buggy. Father had come out to do it, but she stepped between them and said in her big, loud voice,

"No; that 's my job, Colonel. I 've been hands and feet for John Willingham for twenty-six years, and I 'm used to it. No need of troubling others."

And she helped him in, and then put her hand to her big side, and sighed like she was very tired, and looked all around at us, as much as to say, "You see what a hard time I have."

Of course it made every one of us feel bad for Doctor. Aunt Em got red in the face, and father was white, and I was so mad I just ran off to the kitchen without saying even good-by. I gritted my teeth and beat my fist on the table so that the tin things rattled, and Aunt Sally stopped frying potato chips and said,

"Good lawdy-mussy! Whut 's de matter wid you now? — havin' all dem conniptions in here!" So I told her; and she said, "Mis' Willin'ham always wuz a mean white-'oman. She done nag dat po' man mos' to de'f, up an' down, an' all aroun'."

Billy was there, sitting straddled the window-sill, with a cooky in one hand and fried potato chips in the other.

Aunt Sally would give him the very wool off her head if he wanted it.

"I wish she 'd die," Billy said, with his mouth full of potato.

Aunt Sally was horrified, and crossed her fingers, and made some kind of sign; and then she told Billy he ought never to wish anybody was dead, because it was bad luck and it would bring ha'nts to him. Billy always was afraid of ghosts; he swallowed fast and looked at me, but he would n't take it back, because he could n't bear Mrs. Willingham.

Doctor used to be the biggest physician in the county, almost. Everybody wanted him and went to him, but he was so kind-hearted he would n't collect from his poor patients, and the rich ones would forget to pay him; so he would just set it all down in his account book and that would be the end of it. Of course he did n't save much money, and after he was hurt he could n't go about and work any more, so they were pretty poor, and I guess Mrs. Willingham did have to manage a good bit to make ends meet. But then Doctor had a comfortable home, with lands, and orchards, and gardens, and chickens, and cows, so they did n't suffer; and as Aunt Em said, Mrs. Willingham did n't even have a home when Doctor married her; she kept house for her relatives.

And Doctor was good to her as he could be. All the money he could make he turned over to her to fix the place as she pleased, but she loved so to dress that nearly every bit of the money went on her back and the house

went just anyway. At least that 's what I heard Aunt Sally tell Uncle George's cook, Mandy. There was so much of Mrs. Willingham to dress, too! No wonder they were poor.

Doctor's place is about half a mile from us. You pass Uncle George's, and then you turn off the left side of the Big Road into a long, shady lane, and right at the end of the lane is their house. There are so many cedars and magnolias about that the place would look dismal if it was n't for Doctor. But when you went up the little walk from the gate, and saw him sitting in his wheel-chair on the porch, and he smiled at you and called out so cheerfully, why it was n't dismal at all.

Aunt Em used to take me sometimes when she went there visiting, but none of us could talk much because Mrs. Willingham would be so busy telling about how many beds she had sunned that day, and how many hens she had set, and all the tomato plants she had watered, and how she had to run back and forth every few minutes to see if Doctor needed anything, until her back was nearly broken.

I did n't believe it. She looked so square across the shoulders and so strong that I did n't believe anything *could* break her back.

Doctor would just smile in his dear, patient way, and say it was very hard on Fannie, and then try to talk about something else, and Aunt Em would shut her mouth tight like she snaps her shopping bag, and I would get all hot and mad inside, and all of us would be very uncomfortable — except Mrs. Willingham; she would just

fan herself and go on telling more about how helpless Doctor was and how hard she had to work.

So I could n't blame Billy very much that night when he said he wished she would die.

I never shall forget the next morning. I slid down the banister like I always do, going to breakfast, with Billy just behind me, and when we reached the dining-room there was n't a soul there but Aunt Sally fixing our batter cakes and looking like she always does when she is chock full of news.

I asked where father and Aunt Em were.

"Gone over to he'p ten' to de funeral," said Aunt Sally, showing plainly she was about to burst. She dearly loves to make an excitement and then only tell you a little bit at a time.

Billy and I asked both at once, "What funeral?" And then we heard the awful news.

Mrs. Willingham was dead!

And Billy had said only the night before he wished she would die!

Now he looked queer as anything, and he could scarcely eat his breakfast. Aunt Sally said Doctor sent for father and Aunt Em in the night. She had died very suddenly with acute indigestion and was only sick an hour or two. Aunt Sally wound up by saying she only hoped Mrs. Willingham's ghost would n't ha'nt Billy. Father says it is "haunt," and I guess he knows, but Aunt Sally says "ha'nt," and Billy and I often talk her way.

After a while Billy pulled himself together and said

he 'd bet he was n't afraid of any old ha'nt! Just let any old ghost come around trying to ha'nt him and he 'd show 'em!

"What would you do to 'em, Billy?" I asked.

"That 's all right about what I 'd *do*. Don't you worry about *that!*" said Billy, looking very brave.

But just the same he had a worried expression and acted kind of queer all day. It was raining hard, and just after breakfast father came in to get some things and went right back over to Doctor's house. He said we need n't go to school that day, as Aunt Em was n't there to look after us, and he was satisfied that Billy would just as soon as not start off without having washed behind his ears. Father knew Billy. Then he told us to stay in out of the rain and mind Aunt Sally until he and Aunt Em came back.

We had had a holiday the afternoon before on account of a teachers' meeting, and now here was another! But what good was it to us with the rain pouring and everything so gloomy and scare-y?

We stayed in the kitchen all the morning with Aunt Sally, and she told us about every death and funeral she could remember.

With father and Aunt Em away, the dining-room looked so big and lonely that Billy and I ate our dinner in the kitchen that day, and Aunt Sally gave us just what we wanted, which was johnny-cakes, scrambled eggs, and "company" fig preserves.

It was raining harder and growing darker every minute. After a while Aunt Sally got started on a story

about how Uncle Jake and her "Ole Marster" went coon-hunting once and treed a runaway nigger in the swamp. I did n't care so much about that story just then, because I was thinking a story of my own that was more interesting. So I took a cushion from one of the kitchen chairs and went on the back porch, where I could lie close to the wall out of reach of the rain, and look 'way off to the big trees and rocks in the Middle Pasture, and listen to the patter-patter on the roof, and watch the raindrops jump up when they hit the ground. It was a fine place for thinking.

Ever since I can remember I was always thinking stories, and I used to think everybody else did it, and wonder if their stories were anything like mine. So I asked Aunt Em one day when she was sewing quilt pieces and looking very intent, if she was thinking a story. She looked perfectly astonished and said, "Why, no!" and afterwards I heard her say to father, "Beatrice is a strange child." But I did n't see anything strange about asking a simple question like that. Another time I tried Billy. He was sitting on the bank under the big chestnut, with his feet in the water, and gazing hard at nothing. He had n't so much as wiggled his toes for ever so long, and I thought sure he must be thinking an Indian story or a pirate one; so I asked him if he was, and he simply stared at me like he thought I was n't real bright, and said he was wondering whether those fish-worms were dead that he had put in a can the day before.

Then I decided to ask Carey. She is such a funny little thing — always using words wrong and talking

about what sort of house she 's going to build some day — that I felt sure she must think stories like I did. So I asked her if she ever thought up stories when she was alone — and she was insulted! She said I ought to be ashamed of myself, and she was going to tell her mother! I saw there was no use in trying to explain, and after that I gave it up and stopped asking people; but I went on thinking stories all the time.

Sometimes it would be just a short one, and I 'd think it all out in a day; but often it would be a long one that would last a week. I never write these stories down; I only like to think them, and they are always about things that could really happen — not fairies.

That day I was thinking about a girl named Edna being shipwrecked all alone on a desert island, and how she fixed up her cave and took care of herself, when suddenly I heard Ben give a loud dismal howl, like he bays at the moon sometimes. It was the first time Ben had so much as growled since he was poisoned, for he was still so weak and sick he could n't stand on his feet. Billy heard him, too, and ran out from the kitchen. Now father had said to leave Ben alone until he came home, but when Billy heard him howl, he just had to go out and see what was the matter.

Of course I was going, too, if Billy went, so we put on our rubber coats and flew out to the barn, with Aunt Sally yelling after us, " I 'm gwineter tell yo' paw! He said p'intedly fer y 'all to stay in out 'n de rain! I 'm gwine tell him! "

Our barn is awfully big. On the ground floor there is

room for the wagon, and the surrey, and father's cart, and all kinds of harness and things, and around the sides there are stalls for the stock. Father had put Ben in a small calf-stall far off from the big doors, where he would n't be bothered by the passing in and out.

At the back end of the barn there is a door going to the horse lot, and near that door are narrow stairs like a ladder, which lead to the next floor, where the feed-stuff for the stock is kept; and at one end of this floor there was at this time a lot of old rubbish from the house, some broken chairs, an old bed, and odds and ends of furniture which we did n't use.

When we got to Ben he was all excited and trying to stand up, but he was too weak, and he could only bristle up and growl. Billy patted him and stroked his back, and I gave him a drink of water; and we talked to him and called him "good old Ben" and told him he must lie still and not excite himself like that if he wanted to get well, until after a while he got quiet again and dozed off. Billy said he must have dreamed he saw a snake; Ben was terrible about killing snakes.

When we started back to the house it was growing dark, although it was n't late at all. Just as we were about halfway to the back steps Ben howled again, suddenly, and in an excited way. We turned and started back, but we did n't go; instead of that we both stood stock-still, paralyzed by what we saw.

Near the place where the old rubbish was stored in the barn there is a small window, and when Billy and I looked back we both saw a ghastly, dim, white face look-

ing out of that window! With the rain like a veil between us and the barn we could n't recognize the face, but we could see plainly that it *was* a face — and then in a second it was gone!

I grabbed Billy's hand and we did n't say a word, but we fairly split the wind making for the kitchen. When we told Aunt Sally she sat down very suddenly and said to Billy,

"*Now* I hope you *is* satterfied! You done gone a-wishin' somebody 'd die, an' now you done brung a ha'nt to dis place, an' s' help me, I 'm gwineter quit! Dat war n't nuffin you seed but ole Mis' Willin'ham's ghos'!"

My heart went fast and I thought I 'd die, I was so scared, and Billy was white as anything. He forgot all about what he said in the morning about not being afraid of any old ha'nt. To make it worse, Ben kept howling in a weak, dismal way, and in the midst of it all father walked in. We were all so excited thinking about Mrs. Willingham's ghost being in the barn loft that he was right at the kitchen door before we saw him. Every one of us jumped and I screamed. Of course father wanted to know what was the matter, and Billy would n't say anything, and Aunt Sally all of a sudden got very busy fussing around the stove and clattering her pans — father had forbidden her to talk to us about ghosts — so I had to tell him how Billy said he wished Mrs. Willingham would die, and she *did* die, and now her ghost had come to ha'nt Billy, and it was up in the barn loft, because we both saw it.

He was the maddest man I ever saw, and he fairly blessed Aunt Sally out for telling us such things; then he made Billy go with him out to the barn, though Billy hated like anything to go, and he searched that place, from the ground up to the pigeon cote on the roof, and there was n't a sign of anything there. Father said Ben was simply howling because he was sick and having bad dreams, and Billy and I were foolish little cowards and imagined we saw a face, and he did n't want to hear another word about ghosts. There 's not a bit of use in arguing with father, but Billy and I certainly did see that face, and it was n't Eli, either, the man who does our outdoor work, for he had gone in the country on an errand for father. Besides, Eli is black.

I was glad the sun was out the next day, because I 'd hate to see even Mrs. Willingham buried in the rain. I wanted to go to the funeral, but father said no. He does n't believe in children going to lots of places, and as for Billy, he said he did n't care at all about going anyway.

CHAPTER III

At Home with the Crawfords

I hate to be told what to do when I was going to do it anyway.

One morning in May I thought I 'd go out and gather the eggs for Aunt Em. She was always saying she never saw children hate to do anything useful like Billy and I did, so I thought I 'd surprise her. I tried to slip the egg basket out of the kitchen without her seeing me, but I might have known I could n't. She stopped me right at the steps and said, "What are you up to with that basket, Bea? Some mischief, I 'll be bound."

I would n't say a word; so then she told me to take the basket right down to the barnyard and gather the eggs before I did another thing. That made me mad, and when I got as far as the barn gate, I hung the basket on the fence and dodged behind Aunt Sally's house, and than I ran off as fast as I could to the Middle Pasture. It was Saturday, and father had let Billy go fishing with some boys — and father had said he was going to bring Doctor home to dinner. I knew if I stayed about the place Aunt Em would switch me around the legs for not minding her about the eggs. I did n't see any use in that, so I decided to stay in the Pasture until our dinner-bell rang, and then I hoped Aunt Em would be too

polite to be switching children before company. I was doubtful though, for you never can tell about what grown people will do.

I climbed on the rocks and waited until I saw Mary come out on their back porch; then I whistled through my fingers, and she heard me and looked all around to see if anybody was noticing. I knew she and Carey would be coming soon, and sure enough in a few minutes I saw them crawling through the bars of their nailed-up barn gate.

We did n't play any games that morning, because the twins could n't run around on account of one of them having a splinter in her foot; so we just sat by the Branch with our feet in the water and talked about our families. We never grew tired of that.

They would tell me everything about Uncle George and Aunt Lou, and I would tell them all about father and Aunt Em. They thought it was funny for Aunt Em to be father's and Uncle George's aunt as well as ours; but that does n't make her so very old, for when father was born she was only seven, and father and Uncle George always called her just plain "Em."

When grandfather was killed and mother was so delicate she could n't look after things, Aunt Em, who is a widow and has no children, came to live at our house. Billy and I were not born then, but there was our little brother Ralph, who would be nineteen if he was living. Ralph died of pneumonia when he was just a baby, and mother died when I was only ten days old; and Aunt Em says it was then that father turned gray — like he is

now. So of course Aunt Em is part of our family. Carey is always saying she is just as much kin to them as she is to us; but anyway she lives with us.

Uncle George and Aunt Lou also had two children to die; they came between Katherine and the twins and would have been fourteen and eighteen if they had lived. Somehow it seemed to run in our family for people to die.

That day the twins had news to tell; Katherine was going to have a party that night and Aunt Lou was turning the house upside down. There was going to be a big bowl of punch with red cherries in it, and the real, handed-out refreshments would be strawberry ice-cream and silver cake with thick icing on it. A band from Bradford was going to play, and they would dance on the wide front porch, and Mary and Carey were going to wear their white lace dresses and pink sashes and have curls (their hair was already rolled up) and stay up until eleven o'clock. They told me a lot of young people who were invited.

I asked Mary if Pauline Finley was invited. Pauline wears her hair awfully pretty, and has lovely hats, and always looks nice, although she is poor and has to work. Mary said, "No indeed. Mother says the best people don't ask milliners to parties."

And then Carey said that Katherine wanted to invite Pauline, but Aunt Lou thought they ought to draw the line somewhere. I thought it was mean.

After a while the twins got to talking about the sort of houses they were going to build when they grew up.

They were always doing that. Carey once said she wanted a brown buffalo trimmed with white and nasturtiums growing all around it. She often gets her words wrong. Now she had changed all around and said she wanted a big white mansion with Cologne columns all across the front and a long revenue of oaks leading up to it. Mary said she wanted one just like it, only she wanted hers in the city; but Carey said no, it ought to be on the high bank of a big river, and then when the boats went by people would look up and say,

"Whose handsome, combustible residence is that?"

I could n't plan any new kind of house, because every time I tried to think up the nicest kind of house possible to have, I 'd always have it just like our own house, so finally I decided that no house could be better than father's, and stopped trying to imagine different ones.

Once I heard Miss Harriet tell a funny joke on Carey. Aunt Lou was taking Miss Harriet to ride, and the twins were along on a little seat in the foot of the buggy. They were only four then. As they rode past the old Carson place, Aunt Lou said, "That 's a fine old ante-bellum house." The house had lightning rods running up the chimneys, and the rods made more impression on Carey than the house did. Next they passed a new cottage which had rods going up the chimneys also, and Carey said, "That little house has got ante-bellums on it, too; has n't it, mother?" Of course being only four, you could excuse her, but she 's been making mistakes like that ever since.

While we were talking about our people, Mary asked

me why they called father "Colonel." I tried to explain to her just as Aunt Em had once tried to explain to me that father was at one time something on the Governor's staff; but Mary and Carey got all mixed up over it, because being on a staff seemed to them to have something to do with sitting on a rail or climbing a pole, and they could n't understand. I tried to make it clear that the Governor's staff is a kind of staff you can't see, like the north pole, but you can't explain anything to kids.

Once when father was very busy and did n't want to be bothered, Billy asked him that same question about why he was called Colonel, and father said he 'd be — something — if he knew! You can't even write down everything father says and keep up any standing in your Sunday-school class; I hate to tell it, but it 's the truth. You see our Sunday-school teacher had a rule that every time one of us used a very bad slang word, or any word that is n't exactly nice, we must mark it down in our memorandum book and put a penny in our missionary box.

She placed us on our honor to do it, and of course when you promise on your honor to do anything, you have to do it. Father says there 's nothing quite so low as not to be honorable. Billy would n't promise, but I did, because the teacher said it ought to be very easy for girls not to use ugly words. The first week I had ten "gollies," four "bullies," and one "devil" in my book, and I had to borrow the fifteen cents from father. Since then I 've been more careful, and I say "glory"

instead of "golly," and "dandy" instead of "bully." I don't see much difference myself.

When the Sunday-school superintendent heard about it, he said the method did n't appeal to him and it had better be modified. So now we don't have to pay pennies, but the teacher asks if there are any boys or girls who have n't used an ugly word all the week, and those who hold up a hand have their names put on the class honor-roll. Sometimes somebody cheats and holds up a hand, but when they do somebody else usually tells on them. Father says being a tattle-tale is almost as bad as cheating, and I told the teacher what he said, but she did n't say anything.

When our dinner-bell rang and I went to the house, Aunt Em for a wonder did n't say anything about the eggs, and it was a great relief.

After dinner they all went to the front porch, where it is shady and cool and you can hear the mocking-birds out in the tallest magnolia tree. A pair comes every spring, and they sing all the summer long.

Aunt Em fixed the best cushions in the biggest chair for Doctor, and he and father smoked while she did crochet work. After a while Doctor said to me,

"Well, Busy Bee, what 's the news?"

I did n't know of any except Katherine's party, so I told him all about the punch with red cherries, and the strawberry ice-cream and cake, and the band from Bradford, and how all the young people were invited except Pauline Finley.

Aunt Em said she did n't know why Pauline should n't

be invited, and father said it was just Aunt Lou's snobbishness. Aunt Em jabbed her crochet needle hard and said she hated a snob.

I wondered if that was the reason why Aunt Lou would n't let Katherine invite Pauline Finley. Of course Pauline could n't give parties; she had no place to give them, being an orphan and living by herself in the back part of her little millinery shop. But even if she was poor she was very pretty and had nice manners. Miss Harriet never seemed to mind a bit when Pauline set up another shop, and she always said nice things about her.

Doctor had some news that day. His nephew, Philip St. John, was coming to live with him for some months, or at least until he got his health back again. This nephew had not long graduated from a medical college, and he had been doing all sorts of work in a hospital in Bradford, and studying hard at the same time, and now he was nervous and run down from overwork, so Doctor had persuaded him to come and see what a few months of rest and country air would do for him.

Since Mrs. Willingham died Doctor had been living by himself, with only Delia to cook for him and look after the house. Aunt Em and father and I had been over to see him several times, and the way that place looked was a sight to see; Aunt Em wondered what a city-bred young man would think of it.

Father drove Doctor home late in the afternoon, and after they had been gone a while I went down the Big Road a little way to see if Billy was coming, and besides

I wanted to pass by Uncle George's house and see if the front porch was strung all up and down with Japanese lanterns like Mary said. It was, and there were little seats about on the lawn.

Just after I passed the house I met father coming back. He stopped to take me in the cart with him, and I asked him to drive on a little way towards the Wilburs', to see if we would n't meet Billy. Father did n't mind, so we drove through a lane that cuts off quite a bit; it is a pretty, quiet little road, very shady, and there are not many houses near.

We did n't see anything of Billy, but we passed Selmer Bennet walking with Pauline Finley. I told father Selmer could n't be so much of a snob as Aunt Lou. Father did n't say anything, and I could see he was n't pleased about something. I did n't know whether it was about what I said or not, for you never know when you are going to say just the wrong thing to grown people.

CHAPTER IV

A Bit of Family History

One day everything on the place went wrong. It was the last week in May and school had turned out for the summer. To start with, the afternoon before father had sent Ben away to Zeb Jackson's farm because Ben did n't seem to be getting any better. He was weak and wobbly when he tried to walk, and so thin that his ribs stuck out. He lay around in the yard and did n't even show any interest when a stray cat ran by him, so father knew he must be pretty badly off, and as Zeb Jackson was said to be the best horse and dog doctor anywhere about, he decided that the best thing to do was to send Ben over to Zeb's. Well, Billy did n't know about it at the time because he was away when they came for Ben; he was staying to supper with Johnny Wilbur and did n't get home until bedtime, and so it was the next morning before he knew Ben had been carried away. Then he made such a fuss about it and cut up so that Aunt Em finally had to slap him, and father threatened to send him to bed.

But worse than Billy's behavior, Aunt Sally was nearly in hysterics because she vowed the place was

ha'nted, and she would n't move a step except right behind Aunt Em.

Father is the first one up in the mornings, and when he went down and opened the back door at about five o'clock, like he always does in the summer, there was Aunt Sally sitting on the back porch with her apron over her head, and praying right out loud, instead of being in the kitchen getting breakfast.

Father asked her what the matter was, and she said she saw a ghost in the barn loft, and when father got mad and blessed her out for being so foolish, she just set up a howl and had the hysterics so loud it brought Aunt Em and Billy and me down in a hurry.

Then father saw that she was n't putting on, so he tried to pacify her. He gave her a hot drink, which always had a good effect with Aunt Sally, and then told her to get her wits together and tell exactly what she thought she saw.

" I never thunk nuffin', Colonel — I seed it," she said, and then she went on to tell how Molly woke her in the dead of night cackling like all forty. Molly is her pet hen and always roosts right by the back door in the barn. She got up and opened her door and looked out. She could tell by the moon it was just before daybreak, and she watched for a minute, thinking a fox must be after Molly. While she was looking she saw a white light shine through the little window in the barn loft, and in almost the same second it went out. She was so scared she shut her door and bolted it, and then she watched through a crack in her window. Three dif-

ferent times the light flashed across the window and went out as quick as it came, and after a while, when day was about to break and you could barely see, a Black Thing came slipping around the corner of the barn, and it floated away towards our house and passed out of sight around the kitchen corner.

Billy was so pale, and his eyes were so big and black, that he looked like a ghost himself, standing there in his white night-gown. As we favor each other, I must have looked pretty much the same way, for all at once Aunt Em said, real sharp, "You two go right upstairs and dress yourselves, and for heaven sake get ghosts out of your minds! Some poor tramp has probably been sleeping in the barn — certainly nothing worse."

So we had to go, but as we left I heard Aunt Sally say you could call it a tramp if you wanted to, but just thinking about that blinding light made her weak in the knees.

Going upstairs I told Billy Aunt Em must be right about the tramp, because ghosts would n't be flashing lights around, and when they floated away they 'd be white not black.

But Billy said, "Rats! You don't know anything about ghosts. They can do anything they want to, and they can be any color they please."

Then I asked him if he supposed it was Mrs. Willingham.

"Yes," he said, with a gloomy and bitter look. "Either her, or grandfather, or lawyer Burke. And I wish to goodness they 'd stay where they belong!"

I wished so too, and I felt so uneasy that I went back downstairs before I buttoned my dress or tied up my hair. Billy hurried too, and at breakfast everybody looked strained, because father would n't let us talk about the ghost.

Father and Eli went out to the barn and searched it again all over, but there was n't a thing missing nor anything about the cottonseed pile or the hay to show that anyone had been lying there. Father was sure he would find burnt matches to account for the light Aunt Sally saw; he said the tramp had been smoking. But there was n't a single match.

Still father insisted that it must have been a tramp, and wanted Eli to sleep for a few nights in a shed next to the barn. "I 'll fix you a good bed, Eli," he promised. But Eli did n't care about it at all. Then father laughed at him and said surely he was n't afraid of a lazy tramp looking for a place to sleep. The way Eli did his thinking was by scratching his head. He scratched it now and said,

"Nawsuh, Cunnel, I ain't skeered of tramps, but I sho' *is* skeered of ha'nts, an' we dunno fer sho' whedder dat 's a tramp or not."

Father was perfectly outdone, especially when Aunt Sally got to taking on again and said she would n't sleep out in her house by the barn another night by herself if she had to die for it. So Eli had to move her things into the little room back of the kitchen. This room used to be grandmother's storeroom a long time ago when people bought their groceries just two or

three times a year. But after father had the cellar dug under the kitchen, mother used the little room for odds and ends, and now for a long time Billy and I had used it for a kind of rainy-day playroom. It had a lot of our old toys and things in it, which we carried up to the attic when Aunt Sally moved in.

Aunt Em told her she was very foolish to give up her own house out in the yard, which was much more comfortable, but Aunt Sally could n't see it that way and said, "Miss Em, bein' comferble an' satterfied in yer body don't do you no good ef you ain't satterfied in yer min' too, an' I never could be satterfied in *my* min' a-knowin' dat barn wuz likely to be a-breakin' out wid lights in de dead er night, an' Black Things a-runnin' roun' de corner. Nawsuh! I couldn' be satterfied! I wanter stay whar de white folks is at."

So we were in a stew all day. Father was worried, and you could see Aunt Em was a little nervous too.

When you live in a house where two people have been struck dead by lightning, and another person has wished somebody would die, and she *did* die right away, and where three different people see queer things, why it 's enough to make anybody uneasy. For the first time I was glad that I had a little bed in Aunt Em's room instead of having a room of my own, and I felt sorry for Billy, who had to sleep by himself, though his room did open into father's.

There was a terrible tragedy, you see, once in this house. It was a very long time ago, when father and mother were first married and Ralph was a small baby.

Grandfather was living then, and Uncle George and Aunt Lou were living in their new cottage, and Katherine was four years old.

Everybody was friendly and all of them used the Middle Pasture. I can just shut my eyes and imagine how pretty it must have looked when there was no scraggly underbrush, but wide, smooth fields that the cows and horses kept cropped close like a lawn; and how the cows would lie in the shade under the big chestnuts, and maybe frisky little colts would come down to drink at the Branch and then go racing off; and how the gate bars would be taken down late in the afternoons, and grandfather's and father's cows would come into our barnyard, and Uncle George's would go into his, to be milked and then be turned back again; and how sometimes the cows would be kept up, and the little calves would be let into the Pasture to run about.

Well, grandfather had a great friend, lawyer Burke, who had come over from Bradford to spend the day with him. It was the twentieth of July and a very hot day. Grandfather and Mr. Burke were in the lower end of the Middle Pasture, looking at a new horse, when a thunder-storm came up suddenly, and at the same moment Mr. Bennet was driving by — the one we often call Old Man Bennet. Grandfather made him stop in out of the rain and stay to dinner.

Father was out of Pine Grove that day, so he only knew what mother and Aunt Sally could tell him. Mother said that after dinner grandfather and Mr. Burke and Mr. Bennet went in the library, and she took

the baby upstairs to rock him to sleep. Ralph was sick and very fretful, and it took mother a long time to get him quiet. While she was sitting in her room rocking him, she saw grandfather pass and go to his bedroom, and almost immediately he came out again and went back downstairs; and that was all she could tell.

Aunt Sally was clearing up the dinner dishes. She said it was raining hard and a terrible, black cloud had come up, making it almost dark. As she was crossing the hall from the dining-room to the back door she saw grandfather and the two men leave the library and start out to the front porch to look at the cloud. Grandfather and Mr. Burke went nearly to the porch steps, but Mr. Bennet stopped inside the door.

There came a terrible crash and a blinding light, and Aunt Sally says she ducked her head and screamed, and when she looked up again the three men lay flat on the floor, and one of the porch pillars was shattered and burning. Grandfather and Mr. Burke were stone dead, but Mr. Bennet was only shocked and soon came to. It was all so terrible that it made mother very sick, and father sent for Aunt Em.

Grandfather did n't leave a will. Father and Uncle George were all the children he had, and he had already divided most of his property between them; but nothing had ever been said about the Middle Pasture, so when grandfather's matters were all settled, it was found to everybody's surprise that Uncle George and father were each firmly convinced that the Middle Pasture belonged to his own place!

Father said that all the land belonged to the old place except what grandfather gave away, and as he had n't given the Pasture to Uncle George, naturally it still belonged to the old place, and the old place was *his.* Uncle George said that grandfather had surely meant to divide evenly between them, and that the Middle Pasture added to his property would make exactly the same number of acres as there were in the old place.

Then father reminded Uncle George of the extra money in cash grandfather had given him, and Uncle George reminded father of how much more valuable the old house was than the new one. Aunt Em tried to persuade them to divide the Pasture equally between them, but they would n't do it. Both said it was n't a matter of land, it was the principle of the thing; and each thought the other was wrong, and they would n't budge an inch.

Uncle George offered, if father would sign an agreement that the Pasture belonged to the new place, to give him the use of it for his stock, and his children after him. Father laughed in his face and said he would n't. Then father offered to do the same thing if Uncle George would sign an agreement that it belonged to the old place, and Uncle George said *he* would n't.

They would n't go to law because they knew the law would divide the Pasture between them, and they would n't have that. I never heard of such a thing as brothers acting that way, but they were stubborn, and a year after grandfather died feeling was so bad between them that neither one would use the Pasture, and they closed it all up.

Aunt Em says mother had the loveliest, gentlest disposition in the world. She and Aunt Lou had always been friendly, and when things got so bad between father and Uncle George, mother tried every way to show Aunt Lou that she did n't bear her any grudge. But Aunt Lou was hateful about it and took the quarrel up, and one day she passed right by mother in church without looking at her or speaking. It was after service, and people always stopped and spoke to each other. That hurt mother and made father furious, and of course things grew much worse. No matter how good Aunt Lou ever may be now, Billy and I will never love her just for that.

In the next few years our little Ralph and two of Uncle George's children died, but things did n't get any better between the families. Then after a while Billy was born, and fifteen months after that I came, and poor mother died.

Aunt Em said she believed Uncle George was very sorry for father at that time and would have met him halfway, but something seemed to have gone entirely out of father's life. First he was hard and bitter, then indifferent, and it was only of late years that he had begun to take an interest in things again. Through it all Doctor was his close friend, and father would seem to find comfort in his company when he could n't stand anyone else.

And that 's how it was that the Pasture was closed and left to grow wild like a desert island until Billy was eight and I was seven, and they could n't hold us back any longer. We 'd pass by it on the Big Road and

see nothing but a hedge, and we 'd pass by on the Old Meadow Road and still see nothing but a hedge. Sometimes we 'd climb out on our barn roof, and we could see the top of the rock pile showing through the trees, and we were awfully curious to know what those rocks were like. One day in June, when I was seven, I climbed a tall magnolia in our front yard and looked over into the Pasture, and I never saw such a sight! The plum thicket was fairly lit up with big red and yellow plums, until it glowed like a huge Christmas tree, and everywhere there were blackberries, the blackest and biggest I ever saw.

Well, that settled it!

I called Billy and told him, and we searched that rock wall up and down until we found a broken place where we could climb over. When we grew bigger, of course, we could climb the wall anywhere.

That first day in the Pasture was like exploring a new country. We climbed the rocks, and for the first time in our lives we saw into Uncle George's back yard and barnyard. I never had been so excited in my life, because it was the very first new thing that had ever happened to me. We could see Mary and Carey playing in their yard, and it was fascinating to watch them. Of course we knew our cousins by sight, but we had never been allowed to play together.

After that we went every day, and it was n't long before the twins saw us and we got to making signs to each other, and it finally ended in their crawling through the bars in Uncle George's nailed-up barn gate.

Father had told us we must n't talk to people about thinking we saw a face in the barn window. He promised to switch us if we did, and now after Aunt Sally's ghost happened he laid down the law again that we were not to be gossiping about it. But I was dying to tell Mary and Carey, because I knew how bad it would scare them, though I did n't do it. In fact Billy and I did n't talk about it to anyone but Aunt Sally, and she did n't count, because she already knew.

One night soon afterwards father and Aunt Em went to hear a lecture at the Town Hall. Aunt Sally stayed with Billy and me, and we sat on the front steps, where it was cool and we could see the moon when it came up. Eli had gone. He does n't live on the place; he and Lucy, his wife, have a little cabin off in one of the fields, and he always goes home after supper when he has done all the night work.

Of course we got to talking about the ghost. I said after all it must be Mrs. Willingham, because if grandfather or Mr. Burke wanted to come back, they would n't have waited all these years. Aunt Sally looked very mysterious and said,

"Maybe dey *ain't.*"

Billy asked her what she meant, and she said, "'Tain't de fust year dey 's been quare doin's 'bout dis house. Nawsuh! 'Sides dat, a ha'nted house, heaps o' times, has more 'n one ghos' in it. Sometimes dey 's a whole passel uv 'em. One ha'nt draws anudder."

She stopped then and pretended she was n't going to tell any more, because father told her not to; but finally

we got it out of her after we crossed our hearts and promised we would n't let father know she told us.

A long time ago, before Billy and I were born, father and mother were away visiting some of mother's people in the next county. While they were gone Aunt Sally slept on a cot in the little dressing-room next to Aunt Em's room, so that Aunt Em would n't be alone.

One night Aunt Em woke with a raging toothache, so she and Aunt Sally took the night lamp and started across the hall to go into mother's room for a bottle of laudanum. After grandfather died his room was used for a guest room, and when Aunt Em and Aunt Sally got into the hall they saw that the door of that room was ajar, and then, right before their eyes, the door shut and the lock clicked! Of course that scared them nearly to death, and they made a break for Aunt Em's room and locked themselves in. Aunt Sally said, " An' 'twixt us two dey wuz n't no choice 'bout which wuz de skeerdest. De only diffunce wuz dat Miss Em thunk it wuz a burgler, an' me, I knowed it wuz a ha'nt."

Aunt Em knew that nobody could hear them call, because Uncle George was the nearest neighbor and he was too far away. Eli's cabin was nearer, though, and Aunt Em thought maybe she could make him hear the old dinner-horn. It was a souvenir of the old times in Aunt Em's father's day, when all this part of Pine Grove was just one big plantation. Aunt Em kept the old horn hanging on the wall in her bedroom, and father sometimes used it yet to call up Eli, when he was working in some field far off.

Aunt Em went to her east window and blew it long and loud in the direction of Eli's cabin. She waited, and blew it again and again, but he never came. They stayed up until daylight and never heard a sound in the house; then they saw Eli coming across the field.

Aunt Sally yelled for him, and when they went down to the back door, Eli was looking nervous. They told him then what had happened, and he had to own up that he had heard the horn.

"Then why on earth did n't you come?" asked Aunt Em, mad as she could be.

"Caze I could n't, Miss Em," Eli said. "When me an' Lucy heerd dat horn a-blowin' in de dead uv night dat-a-way, bofe uv us thunk it wuz ha'nts a-blowin' it, an' Lucy wuz de skeerdest nigger you ever seed, an' I had to stay wid her. An' when I got outer baid dis mawnin', my knees plum' trimbled." Aunt Sally said Aunt Em just blessed him out for being such a coward, and it was all she could do to get him to go with them upstairs and search the house.

Grandfather's door was locked on the inside! But Aunt Em was awfully brave when it was daytime and Eli was there, so she got father's gun and led the way out on the porch to the window that opens into grandfather's room. This porch goes around the house, and at the back end there is a narrow stairway which opens near the kitchen.

"That 's the way he left," said Aunt Em, when they saw that the shutters were unfastened and there was no one in the room. They went in through the window and

unlocked the door. There was n't a thing missing, but a picture was hanging crooked, and Aunt Sally vowed it had always hung straight. Even downstairs not a single piece of silver was gone, and there was lots of it in the dining-room.

"Now, Billy, I puts it up to you," said Aunt Sally. "Does robbers come to folks' houses jest to git dey pictures crooked, an' show dey pale faces in winders, an' shet do's right in yo' face, an' flash lights aroun' in de night, an' float off 'roun' corners? Jest tell me dat — dat 's all *I* axes."

Billy said he should reckon they did n't, and Aunt Sally said, "Wall, dat 's de long an' short, an' up an' down of it." And she added that father and Aunt Em could call it burglars or tramps if they wanted to, but she called it plain ha'nts, and she never went to sleep a night of her life without tying a "cunjer-bag" to the head of her bed.

Billy and I always said our prayers, but now we decided to help things along by tying "cunjer-bags" to our beds like Aunt Sally did; for with all these awful things coming to light, it was plain to us that we lived in a Haunted House!

CHAPTER V

Dr. Phil

Early one morning Billy and I were carrying Doctor a loaf of new bread. On Friday mornings Aunt Sally always baked salt-rising bread and the cake for Sunday, and in hot weather she did her baking very early while it was cool. Even before Mrs. Willingham died Aunt Em often sent them a loaf, because Delia's bread was never as good as Aunt Sally's.

Going up the lane I asked Billy what he reckoned Doctor's nephew was going to be like, and Billy said,

"I bet you my red crystal against two of your blue glasses he 'll be a bloomin' sissy, too lazy to work, and comin' up here to loaf on Doctor. Say, is it a go?"

But I did n't want to bet my marbles until after I had seen him, and Billy said,

"Oh, come on and be a sport, Bea, I bet you my crystal!"

I would n't do it, though, and I 'm sorry now I did n't; for going back home Billy had to own up that Philip St. John was anything but a sissy, and he did n't have a loafer kind of look. He was simply the best-looking man I ever saw in my life, and he did n't look sick either, unless you counted being thin and rather dark under the eyes. He was six feet tall, and had wide shoulders, and the bluest eyes, and darkest hair you ever saw, and a

smile that made you like him right at once. My only objection to him was that he was n't fair; he was dark as an Indian, and in all my thinking stories the nice men were fair, and only the villains were dark. But outside of having such an olive skin, I afterwards found that Dr. St. John was a perfect gentleman.

When we got over to Doctor's house that morning, the breakfast things had n't been cleared away. Billy and I never rang Doctor's bell, we just walked in; and when we went into the dining-room, I was too surprised at first to speak.

The last time I had seen that room it looked like a cyclone had struck it, for Delia was anything but tidy; there had n't been a thing in place, and the tablecloth was dirty, and one window shade was run up crooked, and the other nearly off. Now it looked positively nice, even if the furniture was old. The floor had been stained and the rugs beaten and mended, the windows were as clear and shining as Aunt Em keeps ours, the shades were straight, and the curtains had been washed; everything on the sideboard was in place; the mantelpiece, that used to look like a shelf for rubbish, piled up as it was with bottles and strings and trash, was now all cleared off and had nothing on it but a neat white cover, with the old family clock in the middle, and at each end an old-fashioned, tall china vase. Best of all, the tablecloth was white and smooth, and in the middle was a blue bowl of roses. I never saw that room look so nice before, not even when Mrs. Willingham was living, and I just stopped and stared. I could n't help it.

They were pushing their chairs back when we entered, and Doctor smiled and said,

"It *does* look different, does n't it, Bea?"

Then he introduced us to the young man, who came right over to us and shook hands in a sensible way, instead of patting my head and rumpling Billy's hair the way so many grown people think they must do when they are introduced to children. If he had patted my head, I don't know how some things might have turned out, for we certainly would n't have got to be such good friends.

He said he was glad to meet us, and now he had found somebody to go fishing with. That won Billy right on the spot, and he said quickly that he knew a dandy place about a mile beyond Wilbur's mill, and before we had been there fifteen minutes those two had arranged a fishing trip. Doctor's nephew certainly was n't hard to get acquainted with.

Doctor laughed and said, "You see, Bea, that 's the way Phil goes about everything. He does n't waste time. When he got here and found me tied down to crutches and a wheel-chair, and the whole place kept according to Delia's idea — her idea being everything out of place — well, that fellow just pitched right in, and in three days' time he worked some magical changes; and not only that, but he has kept Delia in a good humor through it all."

The young man tried to pretend that he had done nothing at all, that he had only suggested things to Delia; but I knew better, for I had heard them talk of

Delia, and I knew perfectly well she never could have made a room look like that.

Doctor called his nephew Phil, so Billy and I started out calling him Dr. Phil. Dr. St. John sounded too old and serious for anyone who had such blue eyes and who looked so young.

Dr. Phil put away the loaf we had brought and said he certainly wanted to get acquainted with the person who could make bread like that, and I told him Aunt Sally would be delighted to meet him any time he came over.

Mrs. Willingham used to keep the front part of that house shut up like a vault; the parlor was always dim and chilly and had a funny smell. I suppose that was why Doctor sat on the porch so much. And then after she died Delia just shut up the parlor and left it alone, and poor Doctor was so lonesome and his back hurt him so much that he did n't care how things were.

But now the doors and windows were all wide open, and the rooms looked clean and home-like; even the front porch had a cheerful, social look. There were several chairs besides Doctor's, and a round table full of papers and new magazines, with a bowl of roses and honeysuckle in the center. And the vines that used to almost cover the porch had been cut and trained so as to leave open places where you could look through and see all the way down the lane to the Big Road. The cedars on each side had been trimmed, letting in more sun and making everything seem entirely different. You could see by the way Doctor looked that he was just as proud

of his nephew, and just as glad he had come, as he could be.

Billy and I left, perfectly crazy about Dr. Phil, and we were so anxious to tell father and Aunt Em about him that we raced all the way home and got there entirely out of breath. When I told about the flowers, father said he hoped Dr. Phil was n't effeminate, and Aunt Em said that being tidy in his habits and thoughtful of a sick uncle was n't any proof that he was n't manly; but father laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

Father would never any more think of fixing a bowl of roses, or having curtains washed, or straightening a crooked shade, than he would think of trying to fly. He always put his hat on a table instead of the hat-rack, and laid his pipe just anywhere, and threw papers on the floor as fast as he read them; and I think he had his suspicions of a man who was different.

Next day he and Aunt Em drove over to Doctor's. I knew they would; grown folks have as much curiosity as anybody else. When they came back Aunt Em was all for Dr. Phil, just as I knew she would be, for no one on earth loves to see things clean and orderly more than Aunt Em does. At the supper table she said,

"Will, that 's a fine young man. He has the artistic eye and hand of a woman, and yet I believe he is manly enough."

Father said yes, he 'd admit that Dr. Phil was just the kind of man that women always liked, and every girl in Pine Grove would probably be in love with him within a week.

"But Bea, my dear," he said, turning to me, "before you fall in love with him, wait and see if he's as good a doctor as he is a housekeeper, and find out if he can manage a horse or plant a garden as well as he can fix a bowl of flowers." And he laughed a little.

We didn't think father was fair to Dr. Phil, and every one of us said so, and Aunt Em said, "Well, time will show what he is."

It certainly did.

I wondered how Dr. Phil was going to get any patients to prove whether he was a good doctor or not. Doctor used to have all the people in Pine Grove before he was hurt, but now of course nearly everybody had Dr. Haines, because Doctor couldn't go to see people any more. However, every now and then, when other doctors had failed, people would go to see Doctor and ask for his opinion about what they ought to do, and then as often as not they didn't pay him for it.

So I spent nearly one whole morning up on the rocks thinking where Dr. Phil could find a patient to start on. At first I thought Billy and I might do; we could eat a lot of green apples and then beg father to send for Dr. Phil. But when I mentioned it to Billy he didn't take to the plan at all. He said he knew good and well what Dr. Phil would do, and by crimins he was n't going to take castor oil to help *any* doctor get started off, and he asked why I didn't get Mary and Carey to do it.

But I was afraid of the twins. They'd be sure to bungle things; it would be just like them to eat too many apples and die, so I said I'd do it myself. Then Billy

stood up with his feet far apart and his hands in his pockets, the way he stands when he 's very much in earnest, and asked me if I had forgotten the time I ate green grapes and had convulsions, and he said, " What 's more, Bea, if you say another word about it, I 'll go straight and tell father."

You could have knocked me over with a feather, for it was the first time in his life Billy had ever threatened to tell on me about anything. We never told on each other when it could be helped.

Then I searched around in my mind for another patient, and for a long time I could n't think of a soul who did n't have Dr. Haines. Then all of a sudden I remembered Mrs. McDade.

She was the sickest person I could think of and the fattest. Every doctor in Pine Grove and from all around had worked on her and failed, because it was her liver that was wrong, and she would n't do the things they told her to do. She would take all their medicines, quarts of it, but she would n't stop eating too much, and she would n't take any exercise, so she kept right on getting fatter and more bilious all the time.

Doctor told her lots of times that she would lose some of her flesh and her liver would get all right if she would take plenty of walking exercise and stop eating so much of everything, especially sweet stuff; but she did n't believe in anything but medicines, and she thought the doctors in Pine Grove just did n't know what was the matter with her.

Then she got Aunt Em to go with her, and she went to

Bradford to see the biggest and highest priced specialist there. Now this big doctor was so rich that he did n't have to honey up anybody to get their money. He just said right out what he thought. Aunt Em said he told Mrs. McDade exactly what Doctor had told her, and it made her perfectly furious. He looked her over and asked her how much she walked every day, and Mrs. McDade said she could n't walk much because she was too heavy for her feet — she was awfully proud of her small feet — and then she tried to tell him about her dizzy spells; but he said never mind about that, and asked her how many heavy meals she ate a day, and how much sweet stuff, and how many servants she kept, and how much patent medicine she took, and by that time Mrs. McDade was getting real mad. But he would n't notice it at all and went right on and told her that what she needed was to throw away her medicines, discharge a servant or two and do some of her housework, stop eating breakfast and sweet things, get shoes three sizes larger and take a good walk every day, and she would get well and also much thinner, and if she did n't do these things she would probably die. And then he charged her a good big fee.

Before they left he took Aunt Em aside and told her that he was n't always so short with his patients, but that this was a case of laziness and overeating, and that what he had told Mrs. McDade was the only cure for her complaint, and the only way to deal with such cases was by being very plain-spoken, and even then he doubted if she paid any attention to his advice.

She did n't.

Aunt Em says she never saw such a mad woman. She vowed she would never see another doctor, and she went straight to a drug-store and bought six bottles of some kind of patent liver medicine and a five-pound box of candy, and went home and kept right on getting fat. She did n't do anything all day but lie around and read novels, and she ate big breakfasts and lots of preserves, and never lifted her hand to do a bit of work, or denied herself anything to eat, or walked a step anywhere.

Aunt Em and Miss Harriet would feel sorry for her and go to see her sometimes, but most of the Pine Grove people did n't like her because she did n't come from one of the "first families" to start with, and then she bored people talking about her liver and how she suffered from being so stout. She was superstitious too, like niggers. She believed in charms and magics and things like that, and she said if there were any real, sure-enough doctors like there used to be in old times, they could work a spell that would cure her; and she wore a little medicine bag around her neck, that old black Jinny made for her, to keep away spirits and bad dreams.

I know that 's true because Jinny comes to see Aunt Sally sometimes, and I 've heard them talking about it. Well, Mrs. McDade was a terrible undertaking for Dr. Phil or any other doctor, but she was the only chance, so I told him all about her. He had come to let me show him the Middle Pasture a day or two after I met him at Doctor's. I explained to him that the Pasture was our family scandal, and that he must n't talk about it to

father or Uncle George because they did n't like to hear the Pasture mentioned. I showed him how to get in through the hole in the hedge on the Old Meadow Road, and then we went and sat by the Branch under the big chestnuts.

He was awfully interested in all I told him, and when we were talking about Mrs. McDade, he asked me if she had much sympathy from people. I told him I did n't think so, because everybody thought like the doctors that she was lazy and greedy and very stubborn.

Then he said, "Note number one: she needs sympathy."

I was surprised, but he went on to ask me about her home and how she lived. I told him that the McDade place was one of the prettiest anywhere around; the house was old, but big and airy, and in a lovely grove of oaks. Mrs. McDade had n't any family, but a yellow woman named Becky slept in the house and waited on her. Becky and Aunt Jinny and another woman ran the place, and they did it very well too. When Mrs. McDade went to ride in her big surrey, she sat on the back seat and filled it all up, and Becky sat in front and drove. About three quarters of a mile from her house there was one of the finest springs in all this county, in a lovely, wild piece of woods where people sometimes went for picnics, but not often, because it was so rough and rocky. It all belonged to the McDade place, but she never minded who went there. She never went herself, although the water was so fine, because you have to climb a hill to reach it. That place always made me feel

as if I was the very first person who had ever been there, it was so still and cool and shady, and the water was very cold and had a delicious, sweetish taste.

When I told him all this about the spring, Dr. Phil looked awfully pleased and said, "Note number two: she lives near an enchanted wood and is superstitious."

I could n't see what that had to do with her liver, but I was finding out that, like father, he often said things I did n't understand exactly. I told him Aunt Em said Mrs. McDade told her she would gladly pay five hundred dollars to the doctor who would cure her liver and make her lose fifty pounds of flesh. She weighed two hundred, and she was n't very tall.

Dr. Phil was looking away across the Pasture as if he had forgotten everything, but suddenly he smiled the way that shows his even, white teeth and makes you like him, and said, "Bea, would you go into it for the sake of the five hundred? Or would you try it just to help a sick old woman?"

I told him if I was a young doctor with my living to make, I 'd be awfully glad of the five-hundred-dollar part of it, because she had plenty of money and she offered the price her own self; but of course I 'd be glad to help her get well for her own sake too.

Then he said that was sound logic and pretty much what he thought about it himself, but to handle a patient like Mrs. McDade he would have to have a silent partner. He looked at me kind of funny, and I stared back. I must have had on what father calls my question-mark

expression, because he answered just as if I had spoken, and said, "Yes; I mean you."

I said I was willing, but I wanted to know what a silent partner had to do. Somehow I had a feeling that anything Dr. Phil told me to do would be right, just the same as if he was father.

He said the first thing was to tell him the way to that spring; he wanted to see it for himself. That was such a little thing that I laughed, and offered to go then and there and show it to him, if he did n't mind a good long walk, or if he would get father to let us have the cart. But he said no, he could n't go that day, he only wanted to know the way to go. I was disappointed until he said, "Never mind, Bea; you just wait a while, and perhaps there 'll be things for you to do. I have to be introduced to the lady, you know, and of course you understand that a silent partner never talks shop to anybody out of the business." Of course I knew that, and I would n't have told even Billy for anything.

Dr. Phil was crazy about the Pasture; he said it was the prettiest place he ever saw. "Why, it 's a perfect picture," he said, "shut in between those green hedges and old stone walls! I 'm coming some day and explore every nook of it." I told him we played there nearly every day, and he could come whenever he pleased.

When we left, Miss Harriet was in her front yard and saw us crawling through the hedge; so I took Dr. Phil over to meet her. You never saw people take to each other the way they did! Miss Harriet showed him her garden and her chickens and flowers, and he was

pleased as anything over a bed of old-fashioned sweet pinks, and he told her he would come over some day and make a frame for her red rambler rose, and then she could train it to shade the back porch. Miss Harriet thanked him and gave us strawberries out of her garden and lovely little gem cakes.

That night I could hardly sleep, I was so excited over being partner with a real doctor, but I wondered how on earth we were going to start about curing Mrs. McDade of terrible fatness and liver complaint.

CHAPTER VI

The Picnic

Early in June there is always a Sunday-school picnic, and everybody in Pine Grove goes. The picnic was to be on Saturday, and all day Friday Aunt Em and Aunt Sally were cooking things for the dinner. Every housekeeper always made a point of trying to have the biggest and best basket, but I believe Aunt Em's was usually about the best, because Aunt Em is the kind of woman who will never be outdone by anybody in anything connected with housekeeping. And always at picnics you could n't help noticing how people would want to get right where Aunt Em spread her basket at the table.

Everybody spread at one long table, but they would be in parties and bunches, and of course our party would be at one end of the table and Uncle George's at the other. Miss Harriet was always with us, and Mrs. Willingham used to be, though Doctor had not been for years; the long day without an easy-chair was too much for his back.

And Aunt Sally always went. She helped about making the lemonade and serving it, and clearing up the table, and waiting on people generally, and she firmly believed that the Sunday-school could never have had a picnic without her.

This year the place was going to be Milton's Grove, a big, cool forest about four miles from Pine Grove. There was a good spring there and a long table already built, and the men liked the place because it was near a big pond where they could fish. Saturday was a beautiful day, bright and clear, with just a little breeze. Billy and I were up by five o'clock, and when we ran down to the kitchen, there were Aunt Em and Aunt Sally frying chicken and baking fresh biscuits so that they would have time to cool before they were packed in the big basket. The ham had been boiled and the cakes and pies cooked the day before, and the chicken salad was packed in a cool yellow crock.

Billy and I dressed early and then ran over to bring Miss Harriet's basket, for she always went in our surrey. Miss Harriet was all ready and waiting for us. She looked real pretty in a new navy-blue and white lawn and her big garden hat. She was flushed in the face like a girl, and if it had n't been for the fine little wrinkles about her eyes, and a few gray hairs, you would have thought she was about twenty.

Aunt Em looked nice too. She wore a black skirt and a white shirtwaist, like she always does; and I wore my pink and white checked percale and a new sun hat made of white linen. Somehow I always have to wear pink. I suppose if you 've got black eyes and hair, and lots of tiny freckles across your nose and under your eyes, pink is your color; but all the same, just as soon as I 'm old enough to do as I please, I mean to wear blue.

Billy looked fine, but we all knew he would n't look

that way long; and when he came out with his hair so sleek, and his face so shiny, and his collar and tie so straight and proper, father said, "Behold while you may Billy's beautiful tidiness, for it will soon be only a memory." Billy grinned and asked father if he was sure he had the new fishhooks.

By eight o'clock we were off. Father and Miss Harriet had the front seat in the surrey, and Aunt Em and I were in the back. Behind us came Eli with the wagon, Billy on the seat beside him, and Aunt Sally in the back, surrounded by the dinner baskets, cushions, palm-leaf fans, buckets, and other such things that Aunt Em always insisted on carrying to a picnic. Aunt Sally rode in state in one of the kitchen arm-chairs.

When we got to Doctor's lane father stopped, and I was never more surprised, for there waiting for us were Dr. Phil with a big basket, and Doctor sitting there in his wheel-chair. Doctor was going to the picnic!

Father and Dr. Phil had fixed it up, and we were all so delighted we did n't know what to say, for just about everybody loved Doctor.

Father had met Dr. Phil the day before at the post-office and found out that the young man was planning to carry Doctor to the picnic. He was going to hire a wagon to take the wheel-chair along, because Doctor could n't be comfortable without it. Of course father would n't hear to such a thing as one of his friends hiring a wagon, when we had so much room and could carry them all in our surrey and wagon, and he told Dr. Phil so, and between them it was all fixed up, and none of us

dreamed of it until we saw Doctor there at the end of the lane, waiting.

Well, we changed all around. Billy and I got in the back part of the wagon with Aunt Sally; Dr. Phil and Eli then squeezed Doctor's chair in with the baskets and things and helped Doctor into the surrey by Aunt Em; then Dr. Phil jumped up into the driver's seat in the wagon by Eli, and we were off again.

As we passed through Pine Grove every person we saw called out something to Doctor, because they were all so glad he was going. And lots of other people were going early. Just ahead of us was a wagon full of boys and girls, and they were singing, and laughing, and calling out to us all the way. A little behind us was Uncle George's surrey. He sat on the front seat with their big basket beside him, and Aunt Lou and the twins were in the back. Katherine, of course, went with Selmer in his high buggy.

When we got to the Grove, everything looked beautiful. All around the spring the underbrush had been cleared away, and rough benches had been nailed between the trees, so that the older people could sit around and talk and enjoy themselves.

Dr. Phil and father picked out a nice place for our party, where it was shady and cool and the ground was thick and soft with a carpet of pine needles. Doctor's chair was placed where he could see the spring and all the people coming and going, and close by there was a bench with a back to it for Aunt Em and Miss Harriet.

On the other side of the spring, about fifty feet away,

Uncle George fixed a place for his people. He spread down a porch rug and opened out little canvas camp-chairs, where Aunt Lou sat with Miss Williams and Mrs. Brascomb. That is, Mrs. Brascomb tried one of the little chairs, but she 's very stout, and it crumpled up with her, so she had to sit on a bench.

Nearly everybody came crowding around to speak to Doctor. Even Uncle George came and shook hands and told him he was glad to see him out. He only nodded and said good morning very coldly to father and Aunt Em, and then went away with some men. Father nodded back in just the same cool way, but Aunt Em said calmly, "Good morning, George. Glad to see you," and went on unrolling her crochet work.

Aunt Sally was already busy rolling lemons for the lemonade, and Miss Harriet and one or two other ladies were helping. Near the spring was a big new wooden tub with a fifty-pound block of ice in it; as fast as the lemonade was made it was poured in. This was always Aunt Sally's job, and she was kept at it all day, for a crowd of young people on a picnic can drink more lemonade than you 'd ever believe. Aunt Sally loved to make it and sit there by the tub and serve it out, because it gave her a chance to talk to everybody. After the people got their baskets put away in the shade and stopped to talk a little, the crowd began to scatter. The women sat about on the benches and talked, and some of them had carried along their fancy-work; the young men and girls strolled about in the woods, and some of them went rowing on the pond; lots of the men and boys went

fishing, and the younger children played in the swings that had been hung where their mothers could see them.

I called Dr. Phil aside and asked him when we were going to start the McDade curing case, and he said it was already started.

I stared so that he had to explain.

"You started things, Bea," he said, "when you told me about that spring. I 've been there — that 's the first move. And the second is to go to see the lady in the case, and you 're going with me to-morrow. And remember, not a word to anybody."

"But she hates doctors. She won't listen to a thing you say!" I said.

"But it is n't a *doctor* that 's going to see her, Bea. It will be just the case of a young man being sent by his uncle's cook to get old Jinny's recipe for making something or other. See?" And he added that he was going to stop by our house, when he started in Doctor's buggy, and ask Aunt Em if I might go along and show him the way.

I had reached up and caught the limb of a tiny tree and was swinging by it. When he said that, I was so delighted that I started to skin-the-cat, but I remembered in time that Aunt Em could see me, and she had told me she 'd wear me out if she ever saw me do that again. Aunt Em is not like Aunt Lou. When Aunt Lou tells the twins she 'll wear them out if they do anything, and they turn right around and do it, half the time she never touches them, although it all depends on the humor she 's in. But when Aunt Em says it, she certainly means it.

So I did n't skin-the-cat. I only danced up and down and asked what my part was going to be in the matter.

Dr. Phil would n't tell me. He laughed and said we must n't talk shop on a holiday, and then he said in a different voice,

"Who is that girl in white over there, Bea?"

It was Katherine. She was with Selmer and some young people, and they were starting down to the pond.

"That 's my cousin, Katherine Crawford, and she is n't so much of a girl. She 's twenty-two and engaged to Selmer Bennet," I replied.

Katherine is so little and slim, and looks so much like a kid, you have to explain to strangers that she 's really grown up and not just a schoolgirl.

Dr. Phil looked a little disappointed, and I did n't know whether it was because she was so old or because she was engaged.

"Well, anyway, she 's a ripping beauty," he said, gazing after her. "You tell her, Bea, I said that she may not be the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life, but I 'll never believe it!"

Father came up before I could answer, and told me to run along and play, and carried Dr. Phil off to meet Katherine and all that crowd. Doctor was having the best time ever. It was his first picnic for years, and he was talking to people he had n't seen for months, and looking so well and happy that I was glad all through me that Dr. Phil had made him come.

After a while I made our high-sign to Mary and Carey, and we slipped off to hunt heart-leaves until

dinner time. I like heart-leaves better than almost any of the wild flowers, they are so green and waxy and lovely shaped, and when you press them a little they have such a sweet, spicy smell; and then I love the little purple jugs that grow up from the roots like funny little toy flowers.

I asked the twins what they had in their basket, and it was almost exactly what we had — boiled ham, and fried chicken, and stuffed eggs, and chicken salad, and pickles, and jelly. Only they had apple pies and ours were cherry, and Aunt Lou had made a chocolate cake and Aunt Em's was lemon-cheese. When I mentioned the lemon-cheese, Mary said she wished we could all eat together, instead of being at different ends of the table. I wished so too, on account of the chocolate cake, but there 's no use wishing anything like that when you have fathers that behave like Uncle George and father did.

There was one thing in our basket they had nothing like, and that was tiny yellow cakes spotted with raisins and baked in fluted rings. When I told about them Carey sighed and said, "I don't see what for families want to be so unhospital to each other!" I said I did n't either, and I promised to save them some of the little cakes. And then we heard the dinner call.

"Whoo-ee! Whoo-oo-ee!" It was Sam Wilbur. He always called because he had such a big voice, and "whoo-ee" meant that they were going to spread the dinner.

We fairly flew back, and they were coming in from every direction. Dr. Phil was walking with Katherine,

and Selmer was close behind them with Pauline Finley. Katherine invited them all to eat dinner with her crowd. Dr. Phil said he was sorry, but he thought Doctor was expecting him with another party, and Pauline hesitated a little. You could see she wanted to accept Katherine's invitation, but Aunt Lou came bustling up and said,

"We are waiting for you, Katherine. Selmer, will you help me with the basket? So sorry you are engaged, Dr. St. John," and not a word to Pauline.

At that very minute Miss Harriet came up smiling and said to Pauline, "How lucky to find you! You must eat dinner with us. Come right along. We need a pretty girl to keep Dr. St. John company."

I just loved Miss Harriet for that. And she took Pauline's little basket, and laid out her thin sandwiches and store cookies just as if they had been the finest kind of things, and made Pauline feel perfectly at home.

The table was very long, with rough bench-seats all around it, but the crowd could barely squeeze in. A lot of children had to stand up outside the bench. Billy and I stood just back of our party, and Doctor's chair was near by. Aunt Sally was there, waiting on people generally, though she kept a close lookout for Doctor and Billy and myself to see that we had plenty of dinner. Every now and then she would punch Aunt Em and say, "Please, ma'am, pass out a few uv dem chicken laigs an' biscuits fer de chillun, an' some uv dat cake an' cherry pie, please, ma'am." Aunt Sally was an angel to us on picnics.

It is certainly funny how much picnic dinner you can

eat. You eat just three times as much as you would at home, and then you start all over again, and try all the different kinds of cake and pie, and drink lemonade, and yet it does n't seem to hurt you.

Dr. Phil was nice as he could be to Pauline, but almost every minute he was looking down the table to where Katherine was, and every time he looked she was looking too. I knew, because I was watching them. You could n't blame anybody for looking at Dr. Phil. He was not only good-looking, but he had a way about him that showed he was used to the very best people and things, and his clothes looked just exactly right. He talked and joked with everybody, and at the same time he was watching out for Doctor, though he need n't have worried about that. Everybody was looking out for Doctor, and many were passing things out to him begging him to "try a piece of this chicken loaf," and "just taste this ham of mine, Doctor," and "do have a bit of this and that," until after a while the napkin across his lap was all piled up with things, and he laughed and said if he ate all that, he would have to be taken home on a stretcher. Everybody laughed, not because it was so funny, but because they were all in such a jolly humor. When Mrs. Wilbur insisted on Doctor's trying one of her tomato sandwiches, Aunt Sally nudged me and whispered, "Humph! Nobody don't want vegibles at a picnic!"

I thought so too.

You never saw anybody eat like Billy did. You 'd have thought it was the last meal he ever expected to see,

and when he asked for his third piece of pie and his fifth slice of cake, father said, "Look here, Billy, we're going to have supper to-night." But Billy didn't care a bit.

After no one could possibly eat a bite more, the women began to clear up and put the things that were still good back in their baskets.

Pauline was folding her napkin to lay it in her little empty basket when Miss Harriet did just the sweetest thing. She said, "Run along with the young folks, Pauline, and we'll take care of your basket for you." And when Pauline had gone, she and Aunt Em packed that girl's basket full of their own things — slices of ham, and chicken salad, some of the little fluted cakes, and a cup of Miss Harriet's jelly that wasn't opened. Of course there wasn't any fried chicken left. No one could expect that.

I was so full and so tired of things to eat that I forgot all about saving the little cakes for Mary and Carey, and they threw it up to me for days afterwards.

I shall never while I live forget that picnic and the way it broke up. Everything was going just fine until about three o'clock, when Mrs. Brascomb and Miss Williams made an awful excitement by falling in the pond. If it had been Mary and Carey, it wouldn't have been so surprising, for they are always doing things like that. At the picnic last year Carey fell out of a swing and made her nose bleed, and the year before Mary tripped up and sat in the tub of lemonade. You expected it of them — but Mrs. Brascomb! Why, she weighs as much

as Mrs. McDade, and she and Miss Williams were all of fifty!

The way it happened was like this. Mrs. Brascomb and Miss Williams and Aunt Lou had been walking near the edge of the pond gathering ferns. On picnics people do things you would n't have dreamed they 'd ever think of. If I had n't seen her do it, I could n't have imagined Aunt Lou tramping around on those wet banks just for a few fern leaves that would wither before you could turn around, when at home she 'd nearly have a fit if anybody had damp shoes or brought in a speck of mud.

All of a sudden Miss Williams spied a lot of mountain laurel in full bloom on the other side of the pond. Mrs. Brascomb said she 'd love to get some of it, and Anderson Jones, who was rowing in a boat near by, heard her. He called out and said he would row them over. Anderson is about eighteen, and he dearly loves to show off. But the very idea of an old woman of fifty, who weighed about two hundred, wanting to row in a little boat! And Miss Williams, too, was perfectly willing. That shows what people will do on picnics.

Aunt Lou had sense enough not to go. When she got her shoes wet, and a little mud on the edge of her skirt, and a scratch on her arm, she had gone just as far in being a sport as you could ever expect of her.

Anderson insisted that the boat was tight and strong and could n't sink, but he did n't mention that a boat could be all of that and still could turn over. Maybe he did n't know it. Well, they got about to the middle of the pond when Mrs. Brascomb's handkerchief blew

out into the water, and she leaned over and grabbed for it. The next minute every one of them was in the pond.

There were a lot of people around. Mary and Carey and I were throwing rocks in the water, and a little way off a crowd of young people were sitting under a tree — Selmer, and Dr. Phil, and Katherine, and two or three other girls.

It was all so sudden nobody had time to think. Anderson never quite lost his hold on the boat, and when it turned over and then came to the surface upside down, he was clinging to it for dear life, while Miss Williams was in the water holding on to him — but Mrs. Brascomb was gone! I guess she went clear to the bottom. The twins screamed of course, and Annie May Jones began to shriek, "Oh help Anderson! Somebody help Anderson! He can't swim!" She never said a word about Miss Williams or Mrs. Brascomb.

Dr. Phil and Selmer happened to be the only men there at the time, and Selmer stood stock-still with his round mouth open, like a catfish. But quicker than I can tell it Dr. Phil kicked off his shoes and threw off his coat as he ran to the bank. Just before he dived he yelled to Selmer, "Call out for the other boat, quick!" There were only two, and somebody was in the other one at the opposite end of the pond. Just as Dr. Phil reached them Anderson yelled, "Help! She's pulling me down!" Miss Williams was holding on to Anderson like grim death, and at the same minute Mrs. Brascomb came to the top for the second time, kicking like everything.

"Gee! She held her breath good that first time she went down!" said little Jamie Hitchett. He was only nine and just learning to swim. Dr. Phil grabbed for Mrs. Brascomb when she came up, and goodness knows how he managed it, but he got her to the boat and told her to hold on, and she certainly did; but it jarred the boat so that Anderson lost his hold, and he and Miss Williams went down, grabbing wildly at each other. Dr. Phil paddled a minute until they came up, then he made a grab for the first thing that came to the surface, which was Anderson, and he shoved him against the boat and yelled, "Hold on there!" and then struck out to help Miss Williams, who had come up again as limp as a rag.

When Dr. Phil dived into the pond Selmer woke up. He threw off his coat like he was going to jump in too, but he didn't jump. He just ran along the edge of the pond yelling for the other boat, which was too far away for the people in it to hear what he said; but they saw that something was the matter and started back, rowing as fast as they could. Annie May and the twins had never stopped screaming a minute, and soon dozens of people came running to the pond. Father and big Sam Wilbur were among the first, and when I saw them throw off their coats and shoes and dive right in, I knew everything would be all right, for there never was anybody who could swim like father. But my heart jumped into my throat and I liked to have died when Billy came tearing up and jumped right in after father. I never was so proud, and so scared all at the same time, in my life;

and then I acted just as much like a silly fool as Annie May Jones, and began to scream to Billy not to let Mrs. Brascomb get him around the neck. When father and Sam got to Dr. Phil it was just in time, for Miss Williams had begun to struggle and catch at Dr. Phil's arms and neck so that he was having all he could do to hold her up while he was paddling with one arm and treading water. And to make it worse Mrs. Brascomb was screaming, "I 'm slipping off! I 'm slipping off!"

She did, too; but father caught her, and Sam took hold of Anderson, and just then Billy and two strong boys of sixteen, who had jumped in after him, came up, and those three boys managed in some way to get that boat turned over. It was very light or they never could have done it.

Then the boys held the boat steady, and Dr. Phil managed to get Miss Williams in, though it was so hard to keep the boat from upsetting again that they would n't try to get Mrs. Brascomb in until the other boat came up. Uncle George and Mr. Peters, the minister, were in it, and after that they managed to get Anderson and Mrs. Brascomb in, and the whole party got back to the bank somehow. Eleven perfectly wet people, and two of them women and in hysterics! Of course that was the end of the picnic.

By that time everybody was there, and every man was shaking hands with Dr. Phil and patting Billy on the head because he was the smallest one. (I know how Billy must have hated that.) Everybody helped, and wrung as much water as they could out of Mrs. Bras-

comb and Miss Williams, and wrapped them up in coats; and Sam Wilbur got a flask out of his coat pocket and made every one of them swallow something. Miss Williams gasped and choked exactly like you do when you get something in your windpipe and have to leave the table in a hurry. Selmer came in awfully handy about hunting up carriage rugs and coats to wrap those cold people in.

In the midst of it all I remembered something — Doctor! I flew like the wind back to the spring, and there he stood, alone, and whiter than a sheet. He was holding to his chair; he had n't brought his crutch, and the ground was so rough he could n't roll his chair, so he just had to wait. Something hurt me clear to the heart when I saw him with his dear old face so white and his eyes so pitiful. I just grabbed hold of him and nearly cried while I told him nobody was hurt, it was only a scare, and they would all be coming in a minute. Then a little color came back to his face, and he patted my arm and got into his chair.

"Thank you, Bea," he said with his patient smile. "I felt sure someone would soon come and tell me. I heard the screaming and running, and — I was just waiting."

Then I cried sure enough, though I don't often do it. It was a shame for no one to think of him all that time, and he did n't know what had happened.

Soon Miss Harriet and Aunt Em hurried up. Aunt Em had Billy wrapped up in somebody's coat, and he was kicking about it.

"Shucks, Aunt Em! I don't want any old coat! I'll dry off fast enough. I'm steaming hot now!" he said; but she made him keep the coat on. They all hitched their horses then, and we went home as fast as possible, with Aunt Em fussing all the way about how she knew father and Billy and Dr. Phil had caught their death of cold.

After we got home, and father and Billy had changed into dry clothes and drunk hot coffee to satisfy Aunt Em and Aunt Sally, father said in the way he has when we know he is very dead in earnest,

"Look here, Em. You people were right. St. John's all right, by Moses! When a fellow has got a nerve like that, and can swim like that, by the eternal, he can fix all the flower bowls and fol-de-rols he pleases! Look at him well, Billy. That's a *man!*"

CHAPTER VII

The Partners Visit Mrs. McDade

Everybody was talking about Dr. Phil — how brave he was and clear-headed and quick to act. He tried to laugh it off and said any good swimmer would have done the same thing, but just the same everyone thought he was very brave, and lots of people were comparing the way he acted with the way Selmer did.

Miss Harriet, who always tries to be fair, said that probably Selmer was not a strong swimmer and was afraid he would make things worse. But we all knew Selmer could swim, whether he was strong or not, and father's lip curled, and he shrugged his shoulders; then with one of his sudden smiles he reached out and clapped Billy on the back, saying, "Billy is n't altogether as strong as a man either, but he knew what to do when lives were in danger. He gave his best." Father does n't often praise Billy, and it went straight to his head like wine. He was so "bigity" and stuck up for days that he was perfectly unbearable, and nobody could get along with him.

But it was Dr. Phil who was the real hero; so when he drove by the afternoon after the day of the picnic and asked Aunt Em if I might go with him over to Mrs. McDade's, she was quite pleased and said yes at once.

When we got there it was about four o'clock, and Mrs. McDade was on her porch, in a kimona with so many pink roses on it that she looked like a very large flower garden. There was a big box of chocolate candy on the table and a lot of illustrated newspaper supplements lying around. She came to the steps to meet us and looked as if she was awfully glad we had come; and to keep her from thinking that Dr. Phil had come on a doctor's business, I spoke up at once and said he had come to get Aunt Jinny's recipe for green tomato pickles, as Delia wanted it. It was quite true that Delia did want that recipe, though Dr. Phil had been obliged to say things to make her think she did.

Mrs. McDade called Becky and told her to go and get the recipe from Aunt Jinny, and to write it down for Dr. Phil — Becky could write very well — and then she very cordially invited us to sit down and visit a while. She dearly loved to talk, and she gave me the box of candy, and then she lit in, and it was a long time before Dr. Phil could say a word.

"There, child, just keep that box of candy. I've already ate enough of it to get my liver upset for a week, if I listen to what the doctors tell me. But to tell the truth I don't pay much attention to 'em, though I used to think Dr. Willingham was some better than the rest. But I don't trust none of 'em now. They take my money, and I take their medicines, and I don't get no better nor lose no weight. I've took twelve bottles of 'Sure Cure for the Liver,' and honest, I believe it's fattened me and made my liver worse. I ain't

hardly ever without pains in my side. I 'm just tired all the time, and I 've got to where I ain't got faith in nothing!" Big and fat as she was, she was real pitiful, and there was a helpless look about her eyes that made me feel as if she was just a child and I was years and years older.

Dr. Phil looked sorry and said very kindly, "I don't blame you, Mrs. McDade, for not trusting that patent-medicine stuff. Every time you bought a bottle of it you were being imposed upon."

"I know it," she said, "but what can anybody do? The doctors all tell me to starve myself and do my own work, and I don't believe 't would help a mite if I done it!" Her grammar was perfectly awful.

"Perhaps not," said Dr. Phil, looking serious and thoughtful; "perhaps not, Mrs. McDade, feeling as you do about it. You know a great deal depends on how you feel and believe about things."

"I 've always knowed that," she said eagerly. "That 's why I won't fool with none of these doing-without-breakfast and doing-your-own-work notions. I don't *believe* in 'em."

From Mrs. McDade's house you could smell the bays in bloom down by the creek on the other side of her pasture. Magnolias are the only things in the world that can sweeten the air on a summer afternoon like a clump of bays can. And of the two I believe the bay smell is the better, because there 's something dreamy and fairy-like about it, and it reminds you of cool, shady, woodsy places with water near by, and wild little red

and blue birds flashing here and there, not singing like the mocking-birds do in the magnolias, but just whistling sharply to each other. Sometimes in places like that, if you keep very still and wait long enough, you 'll hear a tiny, fairy-like chirp, and at first you 'll look and look, and you can't see a bird anywhere, and you almost believe it *was* a fairy-bird, too small for human beings to see, and then all of a sudden you see just the tiniest little speck of a bird sitting on a twig right above you — smaller than a canary and just as yellow, except that his back is brown. You can't help feeling that he has escaped from a cage or a shop window, and that he must need somebody to look after him, for he 's no bigger than your little finger; but just stir a little bit, and you 'll see how much at home he is in the forest. He will be off like a streak, for he 's no toy-bird, but a brave little wren, and he knows those woods like you know your a-b-c's.

It was the smell of bays that made me think of the woods and the birds. Dr. Phil had also seemed to forget things for just a minute. Then he took a long breath and said softly, as if he was talking to himself, "It must be true. What air! There 's magic in it." Mrs. McDade looked up quickly, but he went on, not noticing. "By the way, Mrs. McDade, I was over at your spring a few days ago and really — well, it astounded me!"

She looked interested and asked him what he meant, and then he glanced in my direction with a look that meant it was best not to say too much before children,

and said, "Oh nothing. The water struck me as being unusual, but naturally it would be so, for you and I know —" He stopped, and glanced at me again, and then continued, "Would you care to walk over there with me? I'd like to examine that water again."

I was surprised at Dr. Phil, because I had told him she would n't walk anywhere, and I started to say something. Then I stopped, for I suddenly remembered that he told me, when we were driving over, that my part of the business during that visit was just to sit still and not say a word. When he asked her to take that walk, as if she had been only an ordinary, healthy person, she was so taken aback that she could only say, "Who? Me?" just like Aunt Sally says it. Then she caught up with herself and said, "Why, young man, I ain't been to that spring in five years!"

Dr. Phil stared at her as if he could n't believe it, and said, "You have n't? Why surely you know —" Then he broke off again, and glanced at me, and then looked far off in a thoughtful, mysterious way.

As Billy would say, I was up a tree. I could n't make anything out of the way he was talking.

"Know what?" Mrs. McDade demanded, sitting up very straight.

"Oh well," he said, "'little pitchers,' you know —" And as I 'm living that man winked at her and glanced in my direction!

I knew perfectly well what "little pitchers" meant, for I 'd been hearing it all my life. I felt my face getting red, and I got up and started to walk straight away,

but Dr. Phil stopped me as I passed, and said, "Don't run off, Bea; we must go in a little while," and he squeezed my hand in a way which I knew meant that I must n't pay any attention to what he said.

But I did n't like that about the little pitchers, and I went down to the other end of the porch and began to play with Mrs. McDade's cat. I could still hear them talking. Before she could ask any questions about what he meant he switched off to something else, saying, "These certainly are fine porches. You sleep on the one upstairs, don't you?"

"*Sleep on it?* Oh, my, no!" said Mrs. McDade, perfectly scandalized.

"Well, I should have thought you would, considering —" Again he broke off with that meaning look. "But of course you have your windows all open at night?" he added.

"No I don't either," said Mrs. McDade, real snappish in her tone. "I don't believe in this night-air business. It 's deadly. This here air gets right-down cold by midnight, and the smell from the woods, the bays, and pines, and all that, is so strong that it 's enough to give a well person the headache, let alone a sick woman like me!"

Dr. Phil looked astonished. "But my dear woman! The — er — the *Natural Atmospheric Influences!* Surely you don't shut them out!" And when he said "Natural Atmospheric Influences" she began to stare at him and look scared.

"Oh, there now, Mrs. McDade; of course you don't

want to talk about these things to a stranger. I should n't have said anything, but it 's so seldom you find a place like this where the Beneficent Influences so abound, and I am such a believer in the magic of nature that — well, you must pardon me. Perhaps when you know me better you will tell me more about — er — everything here — and when it was first discovered and all that. But just see! I 've out-stayed my time," he said, pulling out his watch. "If you 'll kindly give me that recipe, Bea and I will be going along. And I 'm so glad to have met you. And thank you so much for the recipe."

Mrs. McDade had been trying to get in a word, and she looked real anxious. "But I want you to stay longer and tell me just what you mean," she finally said. "I don't understand at all. If there 's anything peculiar about my place — "

"There 's nothing but good about your place," broke in Dr. Phil, laughing. "Don't you have one minute's uneasiness. But I want you to tell me more about it, and I 'm coming to see you again if you 'll let me."

Well, she was so anxious to have him come that she made him promise to be back in a day or two.

In spite of the candy I felt awfully disappointed over that visit. I could n't see that we had made any start at all about getting her cured, and I told Dr. Phil so on our way back. He said we would have to go slow or we 'd spoil everything.

"But how can I help any by just sitting there? And you called me a 'little pitcher,' " I said.

Then he said that the "little pitcher" talk was just part of the game, and that I helped a whole lot by making it possible for him to be vague and not have to say too much outright.

"I wanted to get her thinking and guessing, Bea," he said. "Now look here, and let's see if I can make it plainer. When you make a garden, the first thing you do is to plow and harrow the land, isn't it?"

I nodded. Anybody knew that.

"Then you plant the seed."

I nodded again.

"Well, Bea, I've been turning sod this afternoon to see what kind of soil I have to work on and to prepare for sowing. Before long I'll be planting seed, and now and then you'll help me, like you did this afternoon, just by being along."

He looked at me gravely, and I nodded again.

"Of course, owing to the peculiar nature of this soil, there'll have to be a few weeds allowed to spring up. But they won't hurt. They will serve to shelter the fragile little new idea-plants, and then after a while, when the idea-plants have taken firm root in the soil, perhaps the weeds may be pulled out — *perhaps* they may." He seemed doubtful about pulling out the weeds.

Honest, I thought Dr. Phil was crazy. I didn't know what on earth he was talking about; so I asked him what kind of plants and weeds he meant, and he said, "Weeds of Superstition and plants of Enlightenment."

I told him that sounded like "Pilgrim's Progress"

to me, and I 'd give it up. Then he laughed right out like a boy and said, " Never mind, Bea. You 'll understand it every bit some day. And now let 's make old Dobbin go, for I want to get home in time to see that Delia has raspberries for supper and fresh biscuits and poached eggs. I 'm hungry as a tramp."

He tapped Dobbin, and away we went for about half a minute, and then Dobbin slowed down again into his regular walk. It was two miles from our place to Mrs. McDade's and the road between was very pretty. In some places the trees met overhead, making the road seem like a dim church aisle. When I went in the cathedral in Bradford, it made me think of that road in the place where it is the very shadiest. Every now and then a bluebird will flash from one side to the other — I mean in the road, not the church — and in a second another bird follows. There are always two of them. That day the birds flew by, just ahead of us, three different times. The banks on each side were full of ferns and all kinds of wild flowers, and the air was sweeter than any perfume, and now and then a breeze would bring an entirely new and different scent from the deep woods. Sometimes it was pine; sometimes it was bay; and sometimes just the sweet smell of damp earth and leaves.

Riding along that road in the late afternoon with the sun speckling in spots through the trees and making long, slanting shadows in the open places, it was so quiet and peaceful that you just felt perfectly good and happy, and satisfied to be right where you were. That 's

the way I felt, and I think Dr. Phil must have felt the same way; for after he had been quiet a while, he drew a long breath and said,

"It's a mystery to me why people will live in the city, when there are places like this!"

I asked him if he really meant it, and if he would be willing to live in Pine Grove.

He thought a minute and then said, "Yes, I would — if I could make a living and keep up with things — advancement, scientific progress, and things like that."

"But would your family be willing?" I asked. And then I learned something — Dr. Phil didn't have any family! He was an orphan, without any brothers or sisters, and he had lived with a guardian until he grew up and went into a medical school. Even now he called his guardian's house "home," although he wasn't in it much. Once or twice, when he was a child, he had visited the Willinghams, Doctor being his mother's brother.

I found out something else too. He wanted a family. He said to me, "Bea, you don't realize what a fortunate girl you are to have a father and a brother and an aunt right with you." I asked him why he didn't just adopt Doctor and Delia for a family, and he said he was thinking seriously of it, if Doctor and Delia would allow themselves to be adopted.

I never had thought about being fortunate before. I just shut my eyes and tried to imagine how I would feel if I didn't have father and Billy. And it was awful! I had to swallow hard and wink back the tears,

for I knew well enough that without father and Billy I would n't want to live another minute.

It was different about Aunt Em. Of course I was used to her being there, and I was just a little fond of her; but loving her like I did father and Billy was quite another thing, for Aunt Em was very sharp sometimes, and when people are sharp to me it makes me stubborn. Miss Harriet can get anything on earth out of either Billy or me, and she was never sharp to us in our lives, though maybe she would be if she had to live with us. However, I feel perfectly sure that Miss Harriet would never switch people around their legs.

While I was thinking of all these things, another thought which was entirely different flashed into my mind — such a tremendous, grand idea that for a minute I could n't speak. The idea was for Dr. Phil to try to cure Doctor!

Then I thought about the way he had started out with Mrs. McDade, and my heart dropped right down. There he had gone all the way out to her house, and had such a splendid chance to talk to her, and had n't said one single word about her liver or how she could get herself thinner!

Then the next minute I was thinking about the way he jumped into the water after those people, and how he held on to those struggling women, first one and then the other, when he was not strong himself and had come to Pine Grove to get well. If a sick man could do that —

Well, my heart came up again, and somehow I be-

lieved he could do something for Doctor. So finally I asked him if he thought he could, and he said with that smile that makes you like him, "I 've been thinking of that, and I 'm trying, Bea." Then he was grave again and said, "But don't let 's talk about it to other people, because I may not succeed." I told him of course I would n't, but if I was his partner I did n't see why he could n't tell me how he was going to try with Doctor, because I liked to know what you do for sick people.

He answered seriously, like he was talking to a grown person, "Well you see, Bea, just having lost a leg would n't keep Doctor sick so much, if there were nothing else. It 's his weak back and the lack of exercise. Now my idea is that systematic massage for his back and shoulders should help him, and then I want to get him out into the sun and air more, get him to use his crutches more and depend less on the chair. You see he 's never had anyone to really look after him. Aunt Fanny did n't know how, of course, nor Delia. So what he needs is someone to encourage him to get about more actively and interest him in life. Don't you understand, dear?"

I nodded, and he went on, "And you must help me by getting your folks to come over often, and tell him all the news, and keep him cheered up."

I promised to do it, and I don't know when I have felt so happy as I did over the thought that at last someone was going to look after Doctor and help him to get better.

When I got home I wanted to tell everybody about the whole afternoon, and then go and tell Miss Harriet; but being a silent partner, of course I could n't, though it was hard to keep secrets from Billy. If I had known the ghost secret and had to keep it from him, I don't know what on earth I would have done! But having that to talk about, I managed not to let out a thing about being partners with Dr. Phil.

CHAPTER VIII

The Charity Association Meets

Three years ago Aunt Lou organized the City Improvement Club, and made herself president of it, and did n't ask Aunt Em to join. Father said, " Why naturally Louisa would do something like that, being the Most Important Lady in Pine Grove." Then he said he knew Pine Grove would feel so grateful and proud to have the Most Important Lady and her club telling the councilmen how to run the town, and showing people how to keep their back yards clean, and for his part he was so glad to have somebody to teach him, and he was going to plant geraniums all up and down the road before our house and tie pink ribbons on the gate-posts.

I was very young when he said that, but I remember it quite well. Father could make anything seem so ridiculous.

Aunt Em was n't going to be outdone. She organized a Charity Association and was made president, and the Charity Association took much better with Pine Grove than the other club did. Most people said Pine Grove was beautiful enough just as it was; they had a stock law, and that was all they needed; and as far as chickens were concerned, their running about did n't hurt anything. But about the Charity Association it

was different. There were a good many poor families around, and the council and the churches were glad to have the ladies help in taking care of them.

So Aunt Em's club flourished, and Aunt Lou's got to be nothing but just meetings where they had refreshments and talked. The members mostly dropped out, and father called it the City Improvement Joke.

The Charity Association had gone right on for years, and it had done much good. They looked into all the cases that were reported, and they sent out baskets and clothes and bedding and fuel to the very poor people. When they met they sewed things for old people and babies, and made quilts, and gave the whole afternoon to doing what would help someone who needed help.

One afternoon late in June they had a meeting at our house; they were making a quilt for the Flannigan family out in Blue Creek section. There were ten young Flannigans, and the father was crippled with rheumatism and a hard drinker too, and the mother worked to death trying to run a little worn-out farm with only two boys of thirteen and fourteen to help her, so the Association was always doing something for them.

At the meetings they always had a "reading" while the members were sewing. Mrs. Peters was the club reader. She is the minister's wife, and she used to be an elocution teacher, so of course she was the proper one to read. Aunt Em said it was much better for them to listen to some interesting article or story, while they were sewing, than to gabble all at once and talk foolish gossip like they did in some clubs she had heard

of. That afternoon they were going to have for refreshments raspberries and cream, and cake with caramel filling, and I was going to help hand the things in.

I begged Billy to help too, but he 's the kind of boy who simply will not pass things around on a tray. Not even the caramel cake would tempt him. Besides he knew Aunt Sally would have little "gems" made from the last of the cake batter, plastered thick with caramel, which she would save for him. So he said he was going over to the Pasture and dig a place in the Branch deep enough for you to wade over your knees, and told me to come over when I was through with the dinky hen-party. That 's what he always called Aunt Em's or Miss Harriet's parties.

I wanted to hear what Mrs. Peters was going to read. The last time they met at our house she read an awfully funny sea-story, and I hoped it would be another of that kind. They all came early — Miss Williams and Mrs. Peters, Miss Harriet, Mrs. Brascomb, who had got over her drowning, but never had stopped talking about it, Mrs. Jones, and Mrs. Hitchett, who were the wives of Jones and Hitchett, General Merchandise Store. Our parlor looked very pretty. All the four big windows were wide open, and yet there was no glare, for two of the windows opened on the porch, which was always shady, and the other two looked out into a cool green thicket of pomegranate trees. On the old square piano, which always stayed shut and which Aunt Em kept shining like glass, I had set a big bowl of red roses, the way Dr. Phil does at Doctor's, and

out in the magnolia the mocking-birds were singing their very hardest.

Aunt Em said she would call me in to hear the reading later on when the club was through talking business; so I waited on the back porch, where Aunt Sally was cutting up green apples to make marmalade. Aunt Sally was always ready to talk, and soon she said, "Dey 's ructions over to Mr. George's."

"What about? Who told you?" I asked.

"Mandy tole me; dat 's who," she said, and she went on to tell how Aunt Lou was cutting up high jinks because Katherine would n't set the day for marrying Selmer. "Miss Kather'n she jes' keep a-sayin' she ain't in no hurry, an' Mr. Selmer he keep a-argyfyin' 'bout how long in-gagements is onlucky; an' Miss Kather'n's a-gitten cross, an' a-sayin' ef dey don' let 'er 'lone she ain't gwine marry a-tall; an' her maw an' paw a-sidin' wid Mr. Selmer. An' ole man Bennet he 's a-promisin' to settle de Blue Creek farm on 'em soon as dey marries. Dey sho' is doin's over dar."

I told her I thought myself Katherine ought to go on and marry if she was ever going to, and I did n't see what for she wanted to wait until she was an old maid.

"Ole maid!" said Aunt Sally. "Lawdy, mussy! She ain't nuffin but a chile. I rickerleck de day she wuz bawn."

"Well, anyhow, she 's getting along," I said, "and when I 'm grown I mean to be married long before I 'm twenty-two."

"You go 'long way frum here! Ef you don' stay

outer de sun widout no hat, an' git dem freckles off'n yer face, you 'll sho' be a ole maid yersef! You jes' pintedly mark dat down." Aunt Sally was always talking to me that way; but if anybody else had said it, she would have raised Cain, for no matter how she quarreled with Billy and me, she always took our part against anyone else.

I was trying to feel the freckles on my nose, and wondering if they really would have anything to do with my getting married, when Aunt Em called me, and I ran in. Mrs. Peters was just announcing that instead of a story to-day she was going to read one of her Cousin Lucilla's sketches, because it seemed so peculiarly appropriate to the work they were doing. Everybody looked interested, because they knew Miss Lucilla wrote for a big New York paper; and as she used to live in Pine Grove years ago and some of them knew her, they were curious to hear her sketch. They all had their calico pieces and were sewing squares, and Mrs. Peters was sitting by the window, where the light was good.

"Now our last reading, as you will remember, was light and amusing," she began in her lady-like, elocution-teacher voice, "but this will be different. There are ideas in this sketch which give us food for thought, even if they are set forth in rather a whimsical fashion."

I wanted to go right then; I was sorry I waited, and wished I was down by the Branch with Billy. But I was sitting between Aunt Em and Miss Harriet, and I could n't slip out, and they would think I was very

impolite if I just got up and walked out. Mrs. Brascomb looked like she felt just as I did, and several of them looked uneasy. It certainly depresses you to have anyone announce that they are going to read something that will give you food for thought. Miss Williams glanced at Mrs. Jones and smiled in a way that showed she doubted whether that sketch had so much food for thought after all. Miss Williams sometimes wrote things herself for "The Pine Grove News."

But Mrs. Peters didn't see any of all this. She cleared her throat, and unfolded the magazine section of her New York paper, and began: "Life is a Patchwork Quilt."

Everybody stopped sewing in surprise. Mrs. Hitchett murmured, "How beautifully appropriate!" and Mrs. Peters went on with her reading.

"To the small boy, life is one jolly game after another. To the débutante, it is a rose-colored dream. To the cynic, life is a huge joke. To the parents of ten it is a serious and always unsolved problem.

"Some say it's a bubble; some call it a snare and a delusion. The learned say that life is a great book, written upon no paper, and its meaning not always clear; but there are no pages missing, and to the end we go on trying to read. Isn't it taking a more cheerful view, however, to look on life as a patchwork quilt?"

Mrs. Brascomb nodded here, as if she knew all about it.

"We start from childhood sewing in our little pieces.

We very much prefer the bright-colored pieces, and with lavish hand we sew in our pretty plaids and reds and blues — the gay patches of youthful joys — of picnics and dances and larks of all kinds. Here and there we sew in a red, red patch — a first ball, a wonderful trip, or a graduation day."

I never was so mixed up in my life. What on earth did sewing red patches have to do with a ball or a trip? I had my opinion of Miss Lucilla's mind right then.

"Here and there lie sullen, brown patches of ill-temper and misdemeanor. Too bad that they must be sewn in, but all the patches in the basket must be used. It is the quilt of life, and day by day, bit by bit, we sew in the little pieces.

"Even black patches show here and there — black patches of grief and sorrow. We do not want them in our quilt, those black patches, but there they are, scattered about in the rag basket, and the scheme of the patchwork quilt embraces even the black bits. And so, with tears and reluctance and oft-pricked fingers, we sew them in because we must."

Mrs. Peters stopped, with a little break in her voice; everybody was looking down or out of the window; Aunt Em's mouth was shut tight, and Miss Harriet had tears in her eyes. Mrs. Peters' only child, Marjorie, died the year before, when she was fifteen. I wondered if they were all thinking of Marjorie, though I could n't see what that had to do with sewing in black quilt pieces. After a second or two she went on:

"Sometimes we make a whole square of bright, flowered pieces — gay little patches of irresponsible joyousness, of neglected duties, of undue play, and forgotten work; and then all of a sudden the gay, flowered pieces run out, and we find we must finish with pieces of sober gray — the gray of serious reflection that the next day brings, just as 'next days' have a habit of doing.

"Then come the dark blue patches of our moody thoughts and spells of depression. The remnants of those ugly and useful blue calico house-dresses which we must so often don for a never-ending round of cleaning house, only to find, when we get through, that it must all be started over again."

They all looked at each other and nodded, as much as to say, "It 's the truth."

Mrs. Peters nodded too and continued:

"Those moods when we feel like the very small boy on a flying-jenny, who said he went 'round and 'round and never got anywhere. And we do not even have the consolation of the small boy's exhilaration. Then it is that we sew in a very dark blue patch."

Some of them smiled a little at that.

"Occasionally we find a rising sun quilt, where every little movement, every little patch of thought or deed, is planned with mature deliberation, fashioned with infinite care.

"Every little round yellow center marks a Sunday-school never missed. Every radiating triangular patch is a deed of wisdom and discretion.

"Truly a most virtuous quilt!

"An heirloom to be bequeathed to our descendants. But the rising sun quilts are fast becoming things of yesterday. They are too tedious, too boresome in the making, too monotonously good and perfect; in short, the rising sun quilt is entirely too well behaved to be popular with the present generation of quilt-makers."

When she started off about the rising sun quilts, Mrs. Jones looked so pleased you 'd have thought she was the very person Miss Lucilla had written about, because she has three rising suns. But when Mrs. Peters finished up with the part about the rising suns being too well behaved to be popular, I guess I was n't the only one that looked blank. The idea of a well-behaved quilt! I wonder if Miss Lucilla is just a little — touched in the head? I could see plainly that Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brascomb did n't know any more than I did where the point came in, though the others were smiling as if they knew. Mrs. Peters went on reading:

"There are crazy quilts too, where the patches are sewn in harum-scarum, where the motto is, 'every patch for itself and the waste-basket take the hindmost.' We make our crazy quilts when we live for the minute, caring nothing for yesterday, thinking nothing of to-morrow. Our crazy-quilt lives flash out in kaleidoscopic color; they attract a moment's attention and are forgotten. For one grows weary of a kaleidoscope — it is not a thing to be seriously taken or remembered."

Afterwards I asked father what Miss Lucilla could have meant by her "crazy-quilt lives" and "kaleido-

scopes," and he laughed and said Miss Lucilla undoubtedly meant society people. "Those people," he said, "who have no thought in their mushy, haphazard little minds beyond to-day's bridge party and to-morrow's dance. They are the crazy quilts and kaleidoscopes, Bea."

Father ought to know. He's in Bradford a good deal, and he sees those society people. He's often invited to parties there, because he's a handsome man and such an interesting talker, and then, too, he's a Crawford. But I think he kind of laughs at society, like he does at so many things.

But to go back to Mrs. Peter's reading. She started out on something even harder to understand than the crazy quilts.

"But the world progresses," she read, "and many of us are now unwilling to think out for ourselves, and sew in with our own hands, all the little patches that go to make our life-quilt. It is too much trouble nowadays to have original ideas or to fashion our own lives. So we allow them to be machine-made for us. We let our lives be modeled and turned out from the great factory called Convention."

Everybody nodded and looked very wise.

"Here our life actions are not sewn in at all. We are merely stamped in various conventional designs, and we come out, not hand-wrought, individual quilts, but factory-made 'comforts,' and we go forth through the land with our life designs fashioned for us in the exact image and color of ten thousand other 'comforts.'"

Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brascomb were looking blank again, and I had given up long ago.

"However, plain quilts or fancy quilts, crazy quilts or factory comforts, there comes inevitably a time of frayed edges and threadbare spots, and finally — the rag-bag.

"Then that last bourne where old rags are ground into pulp. And then — what?"

Mrs. Peters stopped, and they all began to talk about what a splendid piece it was. I did n't care so much for it myself, and I was glad when Aunt Em made a little sign for me to go and tell Aunt Sally it was time for the refreshments. Of course I stayed until after that part of it, and then I changed out of my white dress into one of my everyday ginghams and ran over to the Middle Pasture to join Billy at the Branch.

CHAPTER IX

Discord Enters Eden

Billy had dug out a wide, lovely place a foot or more deep, and when I saw him, with Mary and Carey wading about up to their knees nearly, I certainly was sorry I had waited to hear that patchwork-quilt piece. The water looked so nice and deep I thought I 'd fish for minnows awhile. So I got Billy's knife and cut a long willow switch to use for a fish-pole; I had a pin, and Billy always had string in his pocket. Just then I remembered that I had four little caramel cakes, two in each of my apron pockets, which I had intended for Billy and myself, but now of course, with the twins, we 'd only have one apiece.

Mary, I saw, was in one of her bad humors. Every time she had a chance she would flip the water up in Billy's face and pretend she did n't go to do it, and Billy was singing out like he does to tease her when she 's mad, " Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your temper grow? " That always makes her furious.

I called them out to get the cakes, but even then Billy kept on singing, " Mary, Mary, quite contrary," and she kept on splashing him as they came out. Billy

was only teasing, but Mary's under lip was out, and that 's always a sure sign she 's mad.

Carey said, " They 've been acting that way ever since we came, Bea, and spoilt everything! I 'm going to tell mother on Mary, and I think you ought to tell Uncle Will on Billy!"

I told her that Billy and I were not tattle-tales, and it was best just to fight out your quarrels and not go telling grown folks everything. They knew too much anyhow.

But I did n't dream it was going to end the way it did. I gave them the cakes, and just as Billy went to bite his, Mary got behind him and jogged his elbow and made him drop it. Then she commenced to dance around and sing, " Billy, Billy, little silly!"

Billy's cake was n't hurt. He picked it up, and brushed it off, and said, " Some little scratch-cats think they are awful smart, don't they?" and went on eating his cake, though he had to scrape off some of the caramel where grit had stuck to it. That was hateful of Mary and it made me mad. They were our cakes anyhow. So I told her if she could n't behave any better than that, she 'd better go home and stay out of our Pasture. Then Carey of course had to put in *her* mouth and say it was n't our Pasture, it was *theirs,* and *we 'd* better stay out! I never heard of such impudence!

So I waited for my chance, and when Mary was nibbling at her cake, I slipped behind her and jogged her elbow hard, and her cake flew out 'way over into the muddy water.

We were all close together, and she thought it was Billy who jogged her, especially when he began to sing out, "Mary lost her cake! Oh, gracious' sake! Mary lost her cake!"

Mary turned red as fire and she flew at Billy, and the next minute he was yelling "Ouch! *Ouch!*" louder all the time, and trying to shake Mary away. Then I saw what was the matter. She was *biting his arm and would n't turn loose!*

Carey screamed, "Stop, Mary! Stop, Mary!" but Mary did n't notice her and Billy kept yelling "*Ouch!*" For a second I was stunned. The idea of *biting* anybody! I had never heard of such a thing. Then something seemed to turn 'round in my head, and I grabbed the willow switch I had cut for a fish-pole, and began to switch Mary on her bare legs in a way I 'll bet she remembers all her life.

At the first cut a red mark came, and at the second Mary turned Billy loose, and dropped down on her feet, and yelled like she was being murdered. Of course Billy did n't holler any more after she let go, I 'm proud to say, and he did n't touch Mary, but he was white in the face, and there was a speck of blood on his shirt sleeve. When I saw that blood, something went wrong in my head again, and I screamed to Mary, "Get up and go home! Get up and go home, or I 'll switch you on the back!"

Carey grabbed her by the hand, and Mary got up, and they flew for their barn gate; but I was right behind them, and I switched Mary's legs all the way across

that Pasture. I never touched Carey, but you never heard anything like the way both of them screamed. And honest, I never knew before they could run so fast; it was all I could do to keep up, and I 'm a good runner.

I guess it was about the best whipping Mary ever had, and I never have been sorry for it. *Biting people!*

Billy was right behind me and kept hollering to me to let her alone and come on back, but I never stopped until we got nearly to their gate and I saw Mandy and Aunt Lou running across the back yard to see, I suppose, what the screaming was about. Then I threw away the switch, and Billy and I ran back up the Pasture to the plum thicket. We crept inside to the place where I kept my dolls, and for a long time we were afraid to come out. Of course Billy blamed it on me, and said now I *had* got us into it, and he hoped I was satisfied. And after I had done it all for him, too!

"But, Billy, she *bit* you," I said.

"Oh, that little old bite was n't much. What made you go and act like something crazy?" said Billy.

I was perfectly outdone and said, "Well, anyhow, you yelled like it was much, whether it was or not. If it was n't much, what made you holler so?"

And he said, "Oh, thunder! I was just so — er, so surprised. That 's all. That kid could n't hurt me — much. And now you 've played the mischief!"

I was so mad I did n't know what to do, and I blazed right out at him, "Yes, I should think you were *surprised.* You were so surprised that you yelled like you were being burnt alive by forty wild Indians! And then

when I switch Mary, and make her turn loose, here you are taking her side!"

"I 'm not taking her side, either," Billy said. "It was all right to hit her once or twice and make her turn loose, but what in the nation made you keep it up? I bet Mary has stripes on her legs for a week! Of course she deserved it, Bea, but just think about the dressing down you 've let us in for!"

When I got to thinking about it, I felt pretty sober. I had given Mary a perfectly awful switching, and I did n't know what was going to come of it. All of a sudden a thought struck me, and I said, "Let 's see your arm, Billy."

His sleeves were already rolled up, but he had pulled down the one on the arm where Mary bit him. He pushed it up again, and that place looked awful; there was a purple swelling and one cut where her tooth had gone through.

Then I knew the best thing to do. This was a time for telling things, not waiting to be told on. I jumped up and told Billy to come on, we had fooled away too much time already. "We 've got to show that place to Aunt Em and father quick before they have a chance to hear about Mary's legs!" Billy agreed that it was our only chance, and we ran to the house as fast as we could.

When we got home father and Aunt Em and Aunt Sally were standing at the back steps, just like they were waiting for us, and of course I got in a panic right away.

"What was all that yelling about, over in the Pasture?" father wanted to know.

Everything was starting wrong. I wanted to tell first, and here they were springing it on us before we could say a word.

"What yelling, father?" I said, because Billy would n't say anything, and I did n't know what else to say.

Aunt Sally spoke up then. "Whilst I wuz a-milkin' down thar in de barn, I heerd de mos' outlandish screechin' over in de Pastur', an' I made sho' somebody mus' be hurted."

Father and Aunt Em were eyeing us, and I knew it was time to act. Billy always waited for me to move first; so I caught hold of him and went up to father and said, "I want you just to look at Billy's arm. Just *look*. Mary bit him." And I showed him the place.

Well, it certainly made a sensation. Aunt Em went flying for the bottle of antiseptic, and Aunt Sally nearly had a fit; but father kept looking straight at us.

"And so — it was Billy doing all that yelling?" he said. And I answered nearly under my breath, "Not all of it, father. Mary and Carey were doing part of it."

"Oh, I see," said father. "It 's perfectly clear now. The twins were screaming to raise the dead — I heard the noise myself — because Mary bit Billy. Oh yes; I see."

Well, you can never fool father. I saw I had to tell him more, so I just got it right out and over with.

"No, they were not," I said. "They were yelling because I switched Mary on the legs for biting Billy!"

"An' sarve 'er right, too!" said Aunt Sally, while she tied a wet cloth on Billy's arm. "Dat chile bin a-bitin' sence she wuz three year ole. A wuthless yallergal whut wuz nussin' fer Miss Lou larnt it to 'er. Mandy tole me 'bout it long ago, but anybody think she 'd bin done bruk of it 'fo dis — an' her lebben year ole! Lawdy mussy in hebben!"

Father told her that would do, and then he told Billy to look him straight in the eye and tell him exactly why Mary bit him. And Billy looked father straight in the eye and told him the biggest story you ever heard of. He said without batting an eyelid, "The little cat bit me because I jogged her elbow and made her cake fly in the Branch. I did n't mean to make it go in the water."

Just think! To tell father a story like that! But it was a terrible relief to me, because I was already in for the worst of it, and it would n't help any for me to own up that I jogged her elbow, because then father would know that Billy had told a story, and that was the one thing father never would excuse. It was all getting in such a mess that I nearly started to cry, when Aunt Em spoke up and said, "Look here, Will. Billy 's trying to fool you about something. I know that look of his! Just let Bea tell you the straight of it. She 'll do it if you give her a chance."

And father nodded to me and said, "Tell just how

it was, Bea, and begin at the beginning and tell it every bit."

I always did enjoy telling about exciting things; I can't help it to save my life; so I just started at the beginning, when I cut the switch for a fish-pole, and told every bit of it. And I got so interested that I forgot and told the truth about jogging Mary's elbow.

Then father stopped me short and said, "Who did you say jogged Mary's elbow?"

I could n't say a word, and I never was so miserable in my life. Billy was glaring at me in the most awful way, for we both knew that father would whip him much quicker for telling a story than he would for jogging Mary's elbow.

Father looked at us hard, and then he said, "There seems to be some mystery here. Let 's see if we can untangle it. Now my idea of the case is this: first Bea takes it upon herself to whip Mary on Billy's account, and then Billy tells a falsehood to help Bea out. Is that it?"

Billy and I did n't say a word, which showed that was it.

"Very unwise, Billy, my son; bad policy to tell lies to get yourself or anyone else out of a scrape. Bad business, my son."

Father spoke in a kind of dry voice, and I could see that Billy felt very uneasy. I did too.

Father was going on, "Now the fact of this whole disgraceful business, as I see it, is just this. Mary is

cross; Billy teases her and makes her worse; Bea does what she can to aggravate the trouble; Mary then bites Billy on the arm, and Beatrice loses her head entirely and runs Mary home switching her all the way. Is that the straight of it, Billy? Is that the straight of it, Bea?"

We nodded, and then father told us to go straight up to our rooms and stay there until he called us. After we got upstairs Billy said, "Now you've played the wild! Here I go and tell father a whopper just to help you out, and then you turn round and give me away! *Ain't* that just like a girl!"

I told him I was sorry I forgot, and then I said maybe father was only going to send us to bed and not switch us, but Billy was very scornful. He said, "Oh yes; maybe the sun ain't going to rise to-morrow. *Maybe* it's not. No; we are not going to catch it. Oh no! And I don't know what *you* are going to do, Bea, but I'm going right now and put on an extra pair of pants."

And he did. A little later we were standing by the window in Billy's room, and from the kitchen below we caught a whiff of ham and coffee. If anything on earth makes you hungrier than the smell of frying ham, I don't know what it is.

When the supper-bell rang, Billy looked perfectly hopeless, and I felt in my bones that we were going to bed hungry, when here came Aunt Sally, grinning from ear to ear. She told us to wash our hands and faces and come on down to supper!

I wanted to know the worst, so I asked her if father was going to switch us after supper, and she said, "Naw, chile. He ain' gwineter switch nobody. I bin a-talkin' to him, an' a-'suadin' him. 'Sides dat, him an' Miss Em is so tickled 'bout dat little rapscallion gittin' switched fer bitin' Billy dey 's 'bout to bust."

That was good news. But when Billy and I washed up and went down to the dining-room, father and Aunt Em were not looking tickled at all. I never saw Aunt Em's mouth shut tighter, and father looked grave as anything and did n't have much to say. Of course Billy and I did n't say much, so that supper was a very quiet meal. After supper father told us to come into the library, and there he said, "I have just a few words to say to you two to-night. You have behaved disgracefully for children of your age. I 'm ashamed of you. Quarreling and fighting! I 'm not going to whip you about the lie this time, Billy, because you thought you had to protect your sister from the result of her misconduct. But just watch out, young man, if you tell me another! And I 'm not going to whip you, Bea, for your behavior to Mary, because you thought you had provocation; but remember, nobody thinks what you did was smart. And one thing more, the first time I catch either of you in that Pasture again, you 'll get what 's coming to you. Now go straight to bed. I 'm ashamed of you both."

I felt almost as bad as if he had whipped us, but Billy did n't. When we got in the hall upstairs, he said, "Moses! Did n't we get out of that easy?" and started

to turn a handspring; but he stopped short and said "Ouch!" for his arm was hurting him. Aunt Em came up as soon as he was undressed, and bathed his arm with the antiseptic, and put on a fresh cloth with something on it that stopped the pain; but she did n't waste any words on either one of us and was very short in saying good night.

CHAPTER X

An Unexpected Caller

Billy and I put on our nightgowns, but we did n't go to bed. We crept part of the way down the stairs to a place where there 's a turn, and from that landing you can look straight across the hall into the library; and there we settled ourselves because we wanted to hear what father and Aunt Em were going to say. Of course it 's very wrong to listen like that, but we knew they would be talking about us, and we felt as if we had a right to know if anything was going to happen. If anyone started towards the stairs, we could fly back to our rooms and be in bed before they could get halfway up.

Aunt Em was blessing us out and telling father he had been too easy with us, because we had orders not to play in the Pasture at all. "I 've told them over and over, Will, that the Pasture is not a fit place for them to play. It is so overgrown with underbrush that I know it is fairly alive with snakes, and playing in the water so much is not good for them either. Then, too, I knew that if they played with Louisa's children so constantly, there 'd be trouble sooner or later. And now you see. And besides all that, if Beatrice is allowed to let her temper run away with her like that, it will

encourage her to be violent and rough; and I don't doubt but that Billy was every bit as much to blame as she was."

Billy pinched my arm and whispered scornfully, "Just listen at that!"

Father said something we could n't hear, but Aunt Em's voice was sharp and reached far.

"Of course I know a child that bites is horrible, and Mary ought to be switched from her head to her feet. But that 's no reason why Billy and Beatrice should be allowed to go unpunished for taking part in such disgraceful rows. They ought to be switched and made to stay in all day to-morrow, or else they 'll think they 've done something smart!"

"She talks like we belong to *her!*" I whispered, and Billy hissed under his breath, "Old cat!"

Father did n't say anything for a minute. From where we crouched we could just see that he was looking worried and drumming on the table with his fingers. He always pays entirely too much attention to Aunt Em anyhow. Then all at once his face lit up like it does sometimes, when you quite understand where Billy came by his funny grin, and he said, "Golly, Em! I 'd love to have seen those twins hiking across the Pasture, with Bea and her switch right behind them! That must have been some picture, Em!"

Billy and I had to grab our mouths to keep from giggling right out, but Aunt Em never cracked a smile. Some people never know when it 's the right time to laugh. She started to say something keen and stinging,

I know, but she only got as far as, "Well, I'm sure I don't see anything —" when the doorbell rang, hard and loud.

Father went into the hall and threw open the door, and who should step in but — *Uncle George!* My heart jumped clear out of place. It was the very first time in my life he had ever been in our house. They stood staring at each other for a second, and Uncle George's face showed that he was fighting mad. Then father invited him into the library, in a voice that was like icicles cracking against each other.

Uncle George answered, stiffer than a poker, "No, thank you, Will. I can say all I've come to say right here. I should like to ask if you know that your Beatrice savagely whipped my child Mary this afternoon, until her legs are striped and full of welts?"

He was so mad his voice was shaking and his face was blazing red, but father was pale and quiet and sarcastic, like he always is when he's in a rage.

"Yes, I knew it," he answered calmly. "Is that all you've come to ask?"

"No! It's not!" said Uncle George, perfectly furious. "I've got more to ask. I want to know what you've done about it? Have you whipped that little devil as she deserves? That's what I want to know!" He fairly bellowed all this out. I'm glad father isn't so disgusting when he's mad.

Before father could answer, Aunt Em walked up and stood between them with her arms folded and her gray eyes shining like glass. "No, he hasn't whipped her,"

she snapped at Uncle George. "And what 's more, he 's not going to! Your Mary got just exactly what she deserved!"

Did anybody ever on earth! I would n't have believed Aunt Em could switch around like that, when she had just been giving father Hail Columbia for not whipping us!

Uncle George stepped around Aunt Em and said to father, with his fists all clenched, "Well, if you don't whip her I 'll be tempted to do it myself the first time I catch her! I give you fair warning!"

I was so excited I stood right up, and they would have seen me in a minute, if Billy had n't caught hold of the back of my gown and yanked me down again.

Then father took a step forward, and his face was whiter than I had ever seen it, and his eyes were blazing like lightning, but he spoke very low.

"No, you won't, George," he said. "You won't lay your hand on Beatrice. Touch one of my children if you *dare* —"

He stopped because Aunt Em had stepped between them again and blazed out at Uncle George, "Before you talk about whipping our children, you go and teach your Mary better than to *bite* people like a vicious puppy! A child that *bites* deserves to be whipped by 'little devils'!"

I forgot all about Sunday-school and honor-rolls, and whispered to Billy, "Bully for Aunt Em!" and Billy whispered back, "You betcher life! Say, Bea, I 'm sorry I called her 'old cat'!"

You never saw anything change like Uncle George's face did when Aunt Em said that about biting.

"Bite!" he repeated after her. "I have n't heard of any biting!"

"No, probably not," father said. "But just the same, your little angel Mary very nearly took a piece out of the arm of my little devil Billy. Would you like to see the proof?" And he started so suddenly towards the stairs that Billy and I barely had time to dodge behind the turn. Then he called Billy two or three times, and after a while Billy answered in a sleepy voice.

"Come right down, Billy, and don't stop to dress!" called father.

Billy went down, trying to look sleepy and innocent and surprised, and he did it very well. Then father, without a word, took the bandage off Billy's arm and showed Uncle George the place. I was glad it was looking so much worse. Then after a minute he tied on the bandage again and said to Billy, "Now go back; straight to bed." And Billy came straight back to the turn on the stairs.

"Judge for yourself whether Mary deserved her switching," father said to Uncle George, as soon as Billy was out of sight. "And understand, please, that Billy does n't fight girls; he did n't touch Mary." Then he went on to tell how it all happened, just as I told it to him, and wound up by saying, "I acknowledge that Beatrice did wrong in losing her temper and acting as she did after Mary had turned Billy loose. She should

not have taken it upon herself to administer the punishment which should have been left for Mary's parents to deliver — more thoroughly. However, Beatrice saw blood on Billy's sleeve, and there is no disputing the fact of her provocation."

Then Uncle George said there was provocation on the other side too, and that Mary would n't have done it if Billy had n't been worrying her, and that father's children were older than his, and consequently more to blame. And more than that, none of it would have happened if Billy and I had been on *our own place*. He said that!

"Listen at the old bonehead!" said Billy, and I made a face at Uncle George. Of course they could n't see, but it helped, anyway.

Father did n't answer. He simply turned his back in Uncle George's face and walked off into the library. Aunt Em said, "There 's no use in bringing up that old matter now, George. I 'd advise you and Will both to keep your children out of that Pasture. It 's made trouble enough."

Uncle George told her nobody had asked her advice, and whirled around and left, and slammed the door behind him. Carey said he always slammed doors when he was mad, so it seemed perfectly natural to see him do it.

Well! This was a nice ending to it all! I asked Billy what he supposed Uncle George was going to do to Mary, and he said, "Nothing."

Uncle George did, though.

He switched them both the next day, not so much for biting Billy as for disobeying him, and going into the Pasture, and playing with *us*.

Carey told me about it all the next time we met at the Branch.

CHAPTER XI

What Bea Heard from the Limb of an Oak

Of course things were worse than ever after that. Billy and I were watched so closely that it was a week at least before we could get into the Pasture again; besides, father and Aunt Em kept us busy nearly all the time. They started that the day after the fight in the Pasture.

I had to mend my clothes, and hem dish towels, and clean up Billy's room, and dust the parlor and library every single day; and Billy had to help Eli clean the barn, and make a row of chicken nests, and mend the garden fence, and weed the roses.

Father and Uncle George had high words again when they happened to meet over at Doctor's, and it was all Doctor and Dr. Phil could do to keep the peace at all. Delia told Aunt Sally about it. Of course Aunt Lou took it up, and soon afterwards she gave a party and invited every lady in Pine Grove except Aunt Em. Then she gave the twins a lawn-party and invited all the children except Billy and me.

The afternoon of the twins' party Billy had to weed a potato bed, and I slipped out of the house right after dinner, because I knew Aunt Em would soon be thinking

up something for me to do. I watched my chance and climbed over into the Pasture from the lower end of the barnyard. It certainly was fine to be in the Branch again, even if I was all alone. I waded a long time and got all cooled off, and then I went over to the rock mound and climbed to the top, where I could lie in the shade under the cedar clump. I was thinking a story about a man and his wife and ten children who were traveling West in a covered wagon, and how they slept under the trees, and bathed in the streams, and cooked their meals on a camp-fire. It was a beautiful story, and it showed how easy it is to be happy and comfortable living like that. I always loved to think stories about living out of doors. It was so nice on the high rock that I could have stayed there all the afternoon, but I knew it would soon be time for the twins' party, and I had a plan to see it all.

There 's a place in the front end of the Pasture, a long way up from the Branch, where you can see right down upon Uncle George's front lawn, and at the same time nobody can see you. The place is up in the branches of a big oak which grows close to the wall which separates the Pasture from Uncle George's place. The wide limbs spread out over his yard, making a lovely shady place, where they had put up a little tent for refreshments and placed several garden seats. I knew I could see almost every bit of the party from that tree, so I climbed up, and went far out on the big limb that hung over the tent and branched into three forks, where you could draw your knees up and sit comfortably as long as you pleased.

I could see into the tent, and there was a deep glass bowl of grape-juice and pretty baskets full of little cakes iced with pink. I had just settled myself in the notch the three limbs make, when Katherine and Pauline Finley and Selmer Bennet came out to the tent from the house. I wondered why Pauline was there, and then I thought maybe Aunt Lou did n't mind having her come just to the children's party. Selmer stretched out on one of the seats and rolled a cigarette, while Katherine and Pauline were fixing little glasses and things in the tent.

None of the children had come then except the Jones children, Sammy, Nora Lee, and Jefferson; they were always the first at everything. But pretty soon all of them came flocking in. Mary and Carey brought them over to the tent as soon as they came in, and Katherine and Pauline gave them a glass of grape-juice and passed the cakes. Then they were to go and play games until time to leave, when they were to come back to the tent and finish up the refreshments. It was awfully interesting to watch them and to know that even if they looked up they could not see me for the thick leaves.

After the children had gone to play on the other side of the yard, Carey called Katherine to come and show them a new way to play "Going to Jerusalem," and Katherine left, telling Selmer and Pauline she would be back directly. Well, if I had just dreamed of all the things I was going to see and hear, I would n't have climbed into that tree for a pretty! But how could I know, when I only meant to see a children's party, that

I was going to have to hear and see all kinds of grown-up secrets and things like that?

Just as soon as Katherine left, Selmer and Pauline began to act in a way that surprised me so I did n't know what to do. They were sitting on one of the seats, and he took Pauline's hand and held it between them, so nobody could see, and said,

"How did you happen to come over, dear?"

Dear! And he was engaged to Katherine! Of course no formal announcement of the engagement had been made, but Katherine's family and Selmer's father and our family, anyway, and Miss Harriet, too, knew that Katherine and Selmer were going together.

"Oh, Katherine asked me to come and help her with the children. How did you happen to come?" answered Pauline.

Then Selmer said in a kind of careless way that the twins were great friends of his and asked him to come to their party, so he thought he 'd stay a while when he brought the grape-juice over from the drug-store.

Pauline looked away and asked him if he did n't come very often, and he said not so often as he went to see *her*. I thought that was very strange. It seems to me, if you are in love with one girl and just the same as engaged to her, you would n't care about going to see another so very often. But from the way Selmer looked at Pauline, and leaned towards her, and held her hand, you would have thought *she* was the one he was engaged to.

Pauline drew away from him, and said in a voice that

sounded as if she was n't quite sure whether to say it or not,

" You know, Selmer, there are some people about here who seem to believe you are engaged to Katherine. I heard Mrs. Peters say — "

Selmer broke in, " Surely you don't believe everything you hear, Pauline! " And from the way he looked at her I could have sworn on the Bible he was in love with Pauline Finley!

I know it is low-down to be an eavesdropper, and so I ought not to tell everything they said; but it showed plainly enough that Pauline considered Selmer *her* lover, and that she was awfully hurt over anyone's thinking that he was engaged to Katherine.

Selmer began to look uneasy. He took his hand away and said it made him tired, the way a woman would listen to every bit of gossip she heard and believe it all. Then he laughed and said, like he was talking to a child, " Oh, don't be foolish, dear! And don't believe everything you hear. Of course I 'm fond of Katherine — we 've grown up together — but you ought to know, dear, how much I care for you. Now, do be sensible. Cheer up and have a good time. Here come some of the children; come on and let 's start a game of King William."

Pauline's cheeks were flushed and her dark eyes were full of tears, but she brushed them away and pretended to laugh as the children came running up.

I was awfully ashamed to be listening to all that, and I thought I would now have a chance to get out of the tree. But I did n't.

They played King William right there by the tent for ever so long, and then Katherine came back and told Pauline that someone had sent for her to come to the shop. Two ladies were there, waiting to see about their hats.

"But you must have your punch and cake before you go," Katherine said, and she made Pauline drink a glass of the grape-juice, but I noticed that she did n't eat her cake. She only nibbled a little bit and crumbled the rest away.

Katherine was very sweet. She told Pauline she was so sorry she must go. "I wanted you to have a whole afternoon off from work, Pauline," she said. Pauline thanked her and said she had had a good time anyway, and I thought, from the way she hesitated and looked at Selmer, that she thought he would leave with her.

But Selmer would n't see, and said in a cheerful, matter-of-fact way, "Good-by, Pauline. So glad you were here. Tell the old ladies we don't thank them at all for taking you away."

After she had gone Katherine and the children went away a little distance, leaving Selmer alone.

When they were all gone Selmer's face changed. He looked worried and unhappy, as if he had n't an idea what to do about something.

He watched Pauline until she was out of sight, then he looked at Katherine, and gazed about, taking in all of Uncle George's beautiful place. Finally he kind of shook himself and drew a long breath, and his face set, as much as a weak face like his could set. Selmer is usually the pinkish kind, but now he was pale, and as

Katherine came back and joined him at the garden seat, I could see from his expression that he had suddenly made up his mind about something.

I knew I was going to hear more things that were none of my business, and I felt dreadfully about it, although I can't help but own that it was exciting. But what could I do? If I tried to climb down, the limb would shake and they 'd hear me, and when I got to the big trunk where there were no leaves, they would be sure to see me, and Katherine might think I was listening on purpose. And even if I told her I had only climbed up there to see the party, what would they think of me for looking on at a party I was n't invited to! I never could stand that. So I tried not to listen, but I could n't help it. You can't keep your fingers in your ears when you are perched up on a high limb of a tree. It 's dangerous.

At first they talked about how hot it was and things like that; but Katherine did most of the talking, and Selmer looked nervous and budgy, like father does when something worries him. After a while, though, he took Katherine's hand, just like he did with Pauline, and broke in on what she was saying.

"I 've got something to talk to you about, dear," he said — just the way he had called Pauline "dear!" Katherine looked surprised.

"Anything serious?" she asked.

"Yes, dear; very serious. I hardly know how to go about it, Katherine, because I have never felt sure that you cared for me as much as — I care."

Katherine began to look sober and to kick at a pebble with the toe of her shoe. A tiny little frown came between her eyes, and she looked down at the pebble as if it had something to do with it. I never have seen eyelashes like Katherine's. They are as long as the last joint of my little finger, and at the ends they are tipped up. The last time I had been talking to Dr. Phil, he had spoken of her as "your pretty cousin with the eyelashes."

After a while she said slowly, "I am very fond of you, Selmer, and I don't care for anyone else, but I — well, I don't think I am one of the kind ever to be desperately in love with anyone."

"But you love me as much as you could love anyone, don't you, Katherine?" asked Selmer.

Honest, I hated to hear all that silly stuff. It made me fidgety. But they kept right on.

"I suppose so — or — at least — Honestly, Selmer, I don't know."

"But, dear, you *will* love me. You are just a girl now and don't know your own heart, but when we are married you 'll find that you cared for me all along. Listen, dear. It is vital to my happiness that we should be married very soon — please don't look like that!"

Katherine had pulled away, and the little frown was deeper; but Selmer hurried on to tell her that there was a splendid business opening for him in Bradford, and if he took it up he would have to do it right away.

Katherine said, just a little impatiently, "Well, why don't you take it up then?"

And Selmer said he could n't bear to go without her.

Then he asked why they could n't steal a march on all their friends, and go quietly to Bradford and be married there, and do away with all the fuss and worry of a church wedding.

I was certainly surprised at that, for Selmer was one of the kind that likes a lot of show about things. He was always showing off some way. Katherine, too, looked astonished.

"But *why?*" she asked, with her eyes wide open. "Why in the name of goodness should we run away, when nobody objects? That 's the most absurd thing I ever heard you say, Selmer. So far as the church wedding and a lot of ceremony and preparation are concerned, I don't care for them myself; but I 'm *not* going to make myself ridiculous running off with a man everybody is crazy for me to marry! I mean, of course, that mother and father like you and have no objection to our being married, and your father feels the same way about me; so why should we marry anywhere but right here at home? These people who steal away to marry, when there 's nothing to run from and nobody cares, always appear so foolish and ridiculous. There 's nothing romantic in that kind of marriage, and people always laugh at them. Now if father swore I should n't marry you, and locked me up on bread and water, and raised all kinds of Cain about it, I might consider the running-away idea. But under the present circumstances — *really,* Selmer!"

She stopped and a little dimple came in her cheek, and then she laughed right out. Selmer did n't laugh,

though. He was dead in earnest, and he began all over and tried his best to make Katherine see that it was much better for them to be married at once than to wait. Katherine did n't see it that way at all. She said she was n't sure of herself; she did n't know her own mind well enough; and if he wanted to marry her, he 'd simply have to wait until she had thought it over more and felt more sure of herself; besides, she had n't expected to marry for at least another year! And sometimes when she thought about it, she did n't think she wanted *ever* to marry.

Well, they talked a long time, and the more he argued the more Katherine was n't willing, and after a while she began to look bored and impatient, and Selmer was nervous as he could be. My legs were getting cramped, and my left foot was asleep, so I began to get nervous myself, and I felt that if they did n't go pretty quick, I 'd scream or chuck a piece of dead limb at them. I never in my life wanted to do anything so bad as to call down, " Don't you do it, Katherine! Just tell him to go to blazes, and then look around for another man! "

Suppose I had!

I had completely changed my mind about wanting her to marry Selmer, after I 'd seen him holding Pauline's hand and telling her how he *cared!* Just then little Jefferson Jones fell down and skinned his knee, and Katherine and Selmer ran to him, thinking he was half killed from the way he yelled.

I never was so glad of anything in my life — I mean glad to get out of that tree.

CHAPTER XII

Several Things Happen

I could n't sleep that night for thinking about what I had heard, and it worried me for days. I knew there was no use in telling Billy. Boys that age don't know a thing about love matters, and I could n't get up enough courage to tell Katherine. I know what *I 'd* think of anybody who climbed up in a tree and listened while my lover was begging me to run away and marry him; it would n't be much.

I was thinking about it the next Sunday at church. Aunt Em was sitting between Billy and me, and Aunt Lou and Uncle George and Katherine were two seats ahead of us. Mary and Carey were not there because they had never stopped going to sleep in church, and Uncle George did n't always make them stay for the sermon; usually they went home after Sunday-school.

Just across the aisle Dr. Phil was sitting by a window. I never had seen him at church before. I tried to catch his eye, but every time I looked at him he was looking at Katherine.

Then I decided that the first chance I had I 'd ask him what to do about it — I mean about warning Katherine against Selmer. He surely ought to know. Maybe if he did n't have a previous engagement, he would marry

her himself. That was a grand idea, because Katherine's heart would be broken when she found out that her lover was false to her — at least it ought to be, for it 's always that way in books — and if there was another right on the spot to make love to her, maybe she would get over it quicker. But anyway, whether he would marry her or not, I made up my mind to tell him. So long as I had one secret with him, I 'd just as well have another. After church I had no chance, for Aunt Em invited him to ride back in our surrey, and it was full of course.

The next afternoon, about sundown, I was helping Aunt Em tie up some vines on the back porch when Aunt Sally came bustling round the corner. She had been visiting Uncle George's Mandy, and she was so chock full of news she could n't wait to go in and take her hat off.

"Whutcher reckon, Miss Em?" she said, all out of breath. "Ole Mis' McDade 's done gone crazy!"

"Crazy!" said Aunt Em, so surprised that she dropped her scissors, while I stood, staring.

"Yassum. Plum crazy, an' out uv 'er head! Mandy's boy, Abe Linkum, seed 'er wid 'is own eyes, an' Abe say he ain't never seed nuffin to beat it!"

Aunt Sally sat on the bottom step and began to fan herself.

"Lawdy! Ain't it hot, Miss Em? Look lak I 'm gwineter melt spiter all I kin do."

That 's the way she always does — tells you just part of anything and makes you ask questions to get the rest out of her! I sat down right by her and asked her what

on earth Abe saw, and she mopped her face with her red handkerchief, took off her hat, and began to unfasten her dress at the neck. Finally she said, "Lander Moses! De dust on de Big Road 's so deep, hit plum tires you out to wade thoo it!" Aunt Em then spoke up real sharp and told her to tell, if she was going to, what all that foolishness was about and what made Abe think Mrs. McDade was crazy. So Aunt Sally then began.

"Wallum, 'tain't no foolishness. Hit 's de gospel trufe. Miss Lou she sont Abe up to de McDade spring soon dis mawnin', 'bout sebben o'clock, to git some 'ticular kine uv ferms what grows dar — caze she wanter plant 'em side de front steps. An' Abe say, 'fo he got to de spring he heerd sump'n a-puffin', an' he 'lowed he wuz n't gwinter be in no hurry 'bout showin' hissef; an' he crep up a little clos'ter, an' hid 'hine a bush. An' bless Gawd! Dar wuz Mis' McDade stan'in by de spring, a-hol'in on to her sides, an' a-takin' in her bref, an' blowin' it out ergin, fit to bust 'ersef!

"Abe say she helt bofe her arms over her head, an' riz up on her tiptoes, den she drapped 'em an' come down on her heels. She done dat *six times*. Den she le'nt over to de lef', fur down ez she could, an' slapped her lef' ankle, an' she done de same on her right — an' she done *dat* six times! Den she lifted a cup er wattah out 'n de spring, an' fo' she drunk it, she helt it up over her head wid bofe han's, an' riz up an' down on her toes an' counted twelve — rale slow. An Abe say when she done *dat,* he jes' pintedly lit out frum dat place widout no ferms, an' he never stopped runnin' tell he struck de Big Road, whar de cart wuz a-waitin'."

It sounded awfully queer to me, but Aunt Em told Aunt Sally that she and Mandy were a couple of old geese to be listening to Abe's tales, because everyone knew that Mrs. McDade never walked anywhere and there was no way to drive from the road to that spring. But Aunt Sally said Abe was n't the only one who had seen her there; other people had seen her coming and going, and always early in the morning; and more than that, Mrs. McDade's Becky herself told Mandy that she had moved her bed on the porch upstairs and slept there every night — right out in the night air!

Aunt Em sniffed in her scornful way and told Aunt Sally the sun must have gone to her head, and Mandy's too, and she 'd better be seeing about supper.

All of this made me wonder if Dr. Phil had been talking to Mrs. McDade again; and I decided to hunt him up very soon, for there were lots of things I wanted to talk about. For a day or two it rained, and then Dr. Phil had to go to Bradford for a day; but my chance came the next Friday morning, when Aunt Em said, " There 's no use in both of you going over to take Doctor's bread. I want one of you to go down to Mrs. Hitchett's and see if she can let me have that setting of Orpington eggs."

I spoke quick and said, " Let me go to Doctor's! " So that 's how I came to go without Billy.

I did n't find Doctor on the porch, so I walked through the house to the back door, and there they were in the yard under the big cherry tree. Dr. Phil was on a step-ladder, picking the cherries and shaking the tree, and Delia and two fat hens were trying to see who would be the first to pick up the cherries that fell. Doctor was

walking about on his crutch, not helping, but looking on, and seeming so interested and happy that it did me good to see him.

"Hello!" he called out as soon as he saw me. "Here's the beautiful bread-bearer. Just lay the loaf on the table, Bea, and come out. This is cherry day. There'll be pies for dinner and preserves later on."

I stayed a while and ate a good many cherries, and before I left I found a chance to ask Dr. Phil if he would walk part of the way home with me, because I had something very important to tell him. He did better than I asked. He nodded and said, as it was a very hot day, he would drive me home; he wanted to go to the village anyway. Doctor gave me a basket of cherries to take home; his cherries were a different variety from ours.

Driving over to the village, Dr. Phil turned into the shady little short-cut that leads off to the Wilburs', for he was going to a place in that direction, and as we came out again who should we pass but Selmer and Pauline! That was twice I had seen them on that road. Selmer looked uncomfortable and Pauline's eyes were red. Selmer called out to us very cheerfully, but Dr. Phil looked grave and only raised his hat and said good morning.

I just looked at Dr. Phil, after we passed them, and he was looking straight ahead and whistling softly. I had been telling him about Selmer and Pauline, and Katherine, and all I saw from the tree. After a minute he said, "But, Bea, if your cousin doesn't love Bennet, why does n't she call it all off? She probably cares more for him than you imagine."

I said I did n't believe she cared for him at all, and I supposed it was like getting into something and not knowing how to get out of it. Her people were anxious for her to marry him, and things were not so pleasant for Katherine at home, anyway, because Uncle George had an awful temper, and Aunt Lou was always stirring up a fuss — at least Mandy says so. And then I told him that the best way to settle it would be for *him* to marry Katherine and put a stop to Selmer right there.

First he laughed; then he said, " I 've thought of that myself, Bea; and I don't see a single thing to prevent, excepting just one small circumstance which might possibly stand in the way — she *might* object to the arrangement."

I said I did n't believe it, because any girl on earth would rather marry him than Selmer. But he laughed again and said, " Thank you, my dear. It 's the very nicest thing that ever was said to me, but when you 're ten years older, you 'll know that there 's no power on earth to determine just why certain people do or do not marry certain other people. It 's the one thing that 's done absolutely without rhyme or reason. You look at a couple, and you wonder what under the canopy of high heaven he saw in *her!* You look at another, and you speculate upon what insane asylum she had just escaped from when she married *him!* You look at still another, and further complexities develop, for it is past human comprehension how either one could have stood the other long enough to have gone through the ceremony! This

affinity proposition baffles calculation. In short, Bea, you never can tell!"

I did n't say a thing, because he was talking 'way over my head, and he knew it. It was just then that we passed Selmer and Pauline. After I looked at him as much as to say, "Now you see for yourself!" he said very quietly, "Bea, I think you are a little girl of discretion, so I 'm sure you 'll see that it 's much better not to talk of this; you might make things worse without meaning to. But I 'm glad you told me what you did, and — I 'm going to take a hand in the game."

He certainly took a load off my mind about Katherine, because there was something about Dr. Phil — I don't know whether it was his chin, or his wide shoulders, or the steady look in his eyes, but *something* — that made you feel that when he took hold of anything, something was going to happen. Look at Doctor, going about on his crutch more than he ever had since he was hurt, and getting better all the time! And look at Mrs. McDade. Nobody could get her to walk a yard nor do a thing with her for years, and here she was walking to the spring and sleeping on the porch, just like Dr. Phil had suggested!

That reminded me; so I told him about what Mandy's Abe saw, and he laughed like everything and said, "It 's working, Bea. But we must stop all this foolish talk about her being crazy. You tell Aunt Sally to tell Mandy to tell her Abe to tell everybody else that Mrs. McDade is simply walking and exercising to reduce her flesh and to improve her general health. And she 's sleeping on the

porch because she gets more air there than in her bedroom. And she drinks the spring water because it is a good tonic; and if she wants to hold up her cup and count twelve, she has a perfect right to do it, and it 's entirely her own business."

Afterwards I told father and Aunt Em all that, and father said, " But what gets me is, how in the kingdom the young fellow ever got her to do it! That 's the mystery. It 's exactly what Willingham and other doctors have been advising her to do for ages, and as fast as one would advise her, she 'd get insulted and go to another, and then wind up by ordering a lot of quack patent medicine."

Dr. Phil drove me home by the Old Meadow Road, and as we passed Miss Harriet's house he said he believed he would go over there in the afternoon and fix her rose trellis, as he had promised. I said that was the very thing, and I 'd come over, too, and bring some cream, and we would all pick Miss Harriet's raspberries and have a little party. She often let Billy and me do that, if we brought the cream. When I got out at the hole in the hedge to go home through the Pasture, he reminded me again that I must n't talk about all the things we knew concerning Katherine and Pauline and Selmer. " Just sit tight and wait, Bea," he said. " And remember you are my Silent Partner."

I promised, but as I ran across that Pasture in the hot sun, I felt in my bones that something awful was going to happen to me if any more secrets got on my mind. Here were two or three things already that I could n't

even talk to Billy about, and then there was the ghost that must n't be mentioned out of the family. It was an awful strain.

When I reached home I found that the Charity Association was going to meet with Miss Harriet at four o'clock. Now was n't that too bad, when I had planned to have a party with just Miss Harriet and Dr. Phil! And now all those old women were going to be there. I asked Aunt Em if I might go and hear the reading, and she said she did n't mind if I changed into a white dress, and brushed my hair, and would n't get in the way — and left before time for refreshments! The idea of such a thing! I knew well enough Miss Harriet would ask me to wait.

I wanted to be the very first one there, so I changed and got over to Miss Harriet's about three o'clock. But I was n't the first, for there was Dr. Phil standing on a box, hammering away at a frame to support the long, thorny rambler branches, and there was Katherine sitting on the back steps close by with Miss Harriet. As I came up Katherine was saying, "Yes, I 'd love to stay, Miss Harriet, but for heaven sake don't ever tell mother! She 'd die at the thought of my staying to Aunt Em's club. And the hat can wait until to-morrow. Hello, here 's Bea!"

"I must go and put a few finishing touches to the front room directly," said Miss Harriet. "I 'll tell you what, Kathie. Suppose you and Bea stay out here and help Philip — he 's promised to water the garden when he finishes the rambler — until time for refreshments."

"Second the motion," called out Dr. Phil. "That's a wonderful idea of yours, Miss Byrd; and you will — you 'll help me, won't you, Miss Crawford? I 'm rather delicate, you know, and there 's no telling what injury I may do myself with that watering-can. I 'm liable to work too hard if there is n't some wise, cool head to insist on moderation."

Katherine laughed and said she 'd better stay by all means, in that case. Then Miss Harriet said perhaps we would like to come in when Mrs. Peters began to read, because they were to have another one of Mrs. Peters' cousin Lucilla's sketches, and they were considered very clever. I had n't forgotten the one about the patchwork quilt, so as soon as Miss Harriet left us to go in, I told Dr. Phil and Katherine that if they would take my word for it, they 'd have a better time in the garden than listening to any of Miss Lucilla's sketches, because I had heard one of them and I did n't think much of it. I tried to tell them about that quilt piece, but I got it so mixed up that they laughed and said they would like to hear one for themselves.

After the frame was finished Katherine and I helped by passing the long rose branches up to Dr. Phil. He tied them to the frame and trained them up to the eaves of the little porch.

"Now!" he said, getting off the box, "that 's all finished, and in a little while Miss Harriet will have as shady a back porch as anyone would want."

It was still too hot for the garden to be watered, so Dr. Phil sat on the step and talked to Katherine, and I

went away and left them alone, because I thought if he was going to make love to her as he had promised — or as good as promised — to do, he 'd never find a better chance than this. Every now and then I 'd go back, just to keep them from thinking I was staying away on purpose, and every time I went back to them they were laughing and just talking nonsense. I never did catch him holding her hand or even looking serious, and I was really provoked with Dr. Phil, for I knew he 'd never get anywhere at that rate. And Katherine was looking so lovely too! Her cheeks were pink, and she was looking prettier, and more like an engaged person ought to look, than I had ever seen her.

I was picking dead leaves from a Cape jasmine bush when she called out, " Oh, Bea! I forgot. I have something for you. I promised Carey to leave it with Miss Harriet for you." I ran to her, and she gave me a little note from Carey. Then I went over to the well-house and read it, and in a minute I was all over being mad with the twins. The note said,

DEAR BEA, — Mary feels perfectly awful about biting Billy. Kathie talked to her about it, and Mary cryed and said she could n't blame you for switching her legs, because she would have done the same thing if you or Billy had biten me. Bea, she took her dime for this week and bought Billy a red Banana handkerchef, so he can wear it around his neck, and play he is a Spanish brigate.

She 's awful sorry Bea, and will you and Billy come down to the Branch to-morrow afternoon at about 2 A. M.?

Your cousin

CAREY.

I went back to Katherine and told her to tell Carey I said yes. Katherine asked me if it was anything about the Pasture, and I said, "Yes, we're going at two, but I know you won't tell on us." Then Katherine said, "Well in that case, perhaps I'd better go along too. It will make it safer for the twins if father catches them."

"And so had I better go along," said Dr. Phil. "It's much safer for the entire bunch if there's a doctor along. He'd come in handy in case of a battle, or a bite, or any little casualty like that."

Right there Aunt Em called me from the front-room window. She wanted me to get Mrs. Brascomb's spool of thread that had rolled out of her lap and gone under the sofa. Anything would roll out of a lap like Mrs. Brascomb's!

They were all there; the same crowd that came to our house, sewing and talking just as hard as they could.

"Tell Katherine and Philip we are going to have the reading in a few moments," Miss Harriet said to me after I got the thread; so I went out and called them in. When they came everybody was awfully cordial, for people liked Katherine much better than they did Aunt Lou, and Dr. Phil had been very popular since he saved Mrs. Brascomb and Miss Williams from drowning. But for all their being so friendly and pleasant, I knew how some of them were going to talk when the meeting was over; for I saw Mrs. Hitchett nudge Miss Williams, and Miss Williams' eyebrows went up a little, and her mouth looked like she was pinching in a smile, and I knew well enough what that meant. It meant they were

thinking that Katherine was engaged to Selmer Bennet, and here she was meeting another young man at Miss Harriet's!

It 's easy to see through grown people's signs, though they seem to think children don't understand anything.

CHAPTER XIII

The Beginning of an Affair

After everyone got settled Mrs. Peters read another one of her Cousin Lucilla's sketches. I thought it was sillier than the one about the patchwork quilt had been, but they all seemed to like it, even Katherine and Dr. Phil. It certainly is funny what ordinary things grown people can be interested in.

But the refreshments made up for everything else. Miss Harriet had peach ice-cream and angel's-food cake. Katherine and I helped to serve it, and when she handed a plate to Aunt Em and said with her pretty smile, "All for you, Aunt Em," what did Aunt Em do but reach out and pat her hand! I stared like a little goose, for I did n't believe Aunt Em would have touched one of Uncle George's people with a ten-foot pole. But nobody could be unkind to Katherine; if everyone was like her there never would be any family quarrels. When they were about to leave, Dr. Phil asked Mrs. Peters if she was going to read another Cousin Lucilla sketch at the next meeting, because if she was he wanted to come. Then he added, "I hate to have to fish for an invitation, but — "

Well you ought to have heard all of them inviting

him! And they were just as tickled as they could be — Aunt Em too.

"In fact Miss Crawford and I were just saying, before we came in, that we ought to be invited to join this Association. Do you bar men?" said Dr. Phil.

That was a terrible story. They had n't been saying any such thing, but Katherine only laughed and did n't deny it. Aunt Em laughed too and said, "Well, we will take the matter up at our next business meeting, and in the meantime you may consider yourselves invited for next week. At your house, is n't it, Mrs. Hitchett?" Father certainly did make fun of it all when I told about it that night, and Aunt Em stood up for Dr. Phil.

"Oh, I admire that young fellow," said father. "I do indeed. His generalship is superb. He 's going to get on in the world, believe me, he is! Not a bit of need to worry about him! Going to old ladies' hen-parties and flattering all of them to death! Pulling them out of ponds and tying up their roses! He 's as good as made. Mark my words, he 'll settle right here and soon be having a list of patients a mile long. Bea, my dear, take my advice: don't be in a hurry to marry right soon. Just wait a little while for Dr. St. John — unless Miss Williams beats you to him."

Aunt Em can't take a joke. "Why, Will! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she said. "That boy is not more than twenty-five, and Elmira Williams is forty-nine to my certain knowledge. I 've heard her say she was twenty-two when her mother died, and I happen to know that Mrs. Williams died twenty-seven years ago."

"She's fifty-six to *my* certain knowledge," answered father. "We are near the same age."

Aunt Em began to pull down the dining-room windows and told Billy and me it was time for us to go to bed.

Aunt Lou would have fainted if she had seen Katherine crawling through the hedge-hole into the Pasture the next day. She had been over to Miss Harriet's first, to see about her hat, and then came right across.

Dr. Phil was already there, and we were waiting for her. I asked the twins if they knew Katherine was coming, and they would n't believe it until her yellow sun-hat came poking through that hole. It seemed awfully strange for anyone besides Billy and myself and the twins to be there. Even Katherine had n't been before in years. She looked all around and sighed. "I have n't been here since I was a child, and I used to slip in with the Jones children to play. Father soon put a stop to our coming."

"Did you and Annie May used to wade in the Branch?" asked Carey.

Katherine said oh yes, lots of times, and they used to make dams and frog-houses just like we do.

"Is n't it lovely?" she said. "It's like a beautiful little world that no one has claimed!"

"Let's explore it," said Dr. Phil. "There must be lots of places you've forgotten. No telling what we may discover! Now, Bea, while you young folks are wading, Miss Crawford and I are going exploring."

"Well, you'd better be careful how you explode Grouchy; he'll bite if you put your hand too close,"

warned Carey. They left us under the big chestnuts, and we did n't see them again until the shadows got so long I knew it was nearly sundown. I mean we only saw them at a distance, for most of the time they were not exploring at all, but just sitting under the cedars at the top of the rock-pile.

It was all I could do to get Billy to meet the twins that afternoon, and when we first got there he and Mary were as stiff as pokers, and I would have felt perfectly awful if the stripes had still been on Mary's legs. I was much relieved when I saw they were not.

None of us talked much at first. We just waded about in the Branch, Mary and Carey staying close together and Billy and I doing the same. But when Dr. Phil came and joined us, he taught us a new guessing game, and in a little while every one of us forgot there had ever been a fight. We were in the midst of the game when Katherine came, and after she and Dr. Phil had gone to "explode the Pasture," as Carey said, we went on playing as if nothing had ever happened. Billy even showed Mary the mark her tooth had left, and she was awfully interested in it, and neither of them showed the least bad feeling.

Before Katherine and Dr. Phil came back to us I thought of something. Uncle George and Aunt Lou were dead set on Katherine's marrying Selmer, and if they knew she had been in the Pasture, talking for *hours* with another young man, they might do something to spoil everything — lock her up, maybe — they often do that in books. So I decided to caution the twins, and I

told them, if I was in their place, I would n't say anything at home about Katherine being in the Pasture or meeting Dr. Phil either. And Mary wanted to know *why!* Some people certainly are thick-headed.

" Because," I said, " Uncle George would ask you right away how you knew anything about it, and if you could have heard the way he talked that night at our house, you would n't be in a hurry to let him know *you 'd* been in the Pasture again! That 's why."

They looked very anxious.

" But we 're not going to tell, Bea. *Of course* we 're not! " said Carey.

I had my doubts, however, about Mary. She usually told everything.

CHAPTER XIV

The Ghost Reappears

I was now so taken up with other things that I had forgotten all about the ghost. We played in the Pasture nearly all the time, and I don't see how father and Aunt Em could have helped knowing it, though we were very careful not to let them see us when we were climbing the wall. But if they did know it, they made no sign. I guess they had decided that the Pasture was one thing there was n't any use arguing about with Billy and me.

All through July Katherine and Dr. Phil came, and would sometimes spend whole afternoons with us there; but I don't think they ever came at other times, though it was n't Dr. Phil's fault. I think he would have liked to meet Katherine in the Pasture every single day if she would have come, but she would n't, except when we children were there. Once when we were all building a dam and they were sitting on the grass a little way off, thinking no one was noticing them, I heard Katherine say, "Oh, Philip, I could n't! I never come but when the children are here."

And he said quickly, "Of course, you 're right, Katherine. I should n't have asked that, so long as —" I did n't catch any more, but I was very glad to find they were calling each other Katherine and Philip. I won-

dered why she did n't say Phil, but I found out afterwards that she simply liked Philip better.

Anyway, I was glad they had gone a step further, because Dr. Phil certainly did seem to go mighty slow about courting anybody, though he did other things so fast that they were done before you knew he had started. Carey said he called at their house frequently, but did n't ask specially for Katherine; he just talked to all of them.

We had also seen him several times with Selmer Bennet, which Billy did n't like at all.

"What 's he wanter go with a muff like that for!" he said with contempt.

But I knew what it meant — Dr. Phil was taking a hand in the game. He had made friends with Pauline too, for he had been seen walking with her once or twice.

Well, with all this to think about, it 's no wonder the ghost had gone out of my mind. But ghosts are things that can't be forgotten very long at a time. One day when father was away on business, we had Miss Harriet to spend the day with us. It was the hottest day I ever remember. There was n't a breath of wind, and the sky was white-hot, like melted glass.

Billy was n't feeling well, because the day before he ate green plums; so Aunt Em made us both stay in. That was always the way of it. Whenever Billy did things, I 'd catch it too.

Aunt Em and Miss Harriet were sewing, and we were all on the back porch, which is the coolest spot on the place, for the sun never reaches it. Pretty soon Aunt Sally came fussing up from the barn, with her eyes so

big and round that I knew in a minute she had something to tell.

She started off in her usual exciting way, "Whutcher reckon, Miss Em! Sump'n done happen up dar in de barn lof' ergin!"

Then she stopped and asked Billy how he felt, and asked Aunt Em if she wanted the chickens fried or made into a pie for dinner, and told me my hair ribbon was undone, and was going on talking about all kinds of things until every one of us separately had asked what had happened in the barn. Billy was awfully interested, and finally she told us in her own way and her own time.

To begin with, our turkey-hen had stolen a nest up in the loft where the old things are stored, and no one knew it until she had begun to set. She was the kind of turkey that would n't come off her nest even to eat, so Aunt Sally had been carrying food to her now and then when Eli was right there; any other time she would n't go a step on account of Mrs. Willingham's ghost.

Well, that morning when she went out to gather eggs, there was the turkey-hen walking around in the barn-yard; so Aunt Sally knew she had been run off or frightened off her nest, and so she and Eli went up to the loft to see about the eggs.

Then, just as usual, Aunt Sally switched off to something else as soon as she saw we were interested. "Dat ole turkey-hen always *is* had bad luck wid 'er aigs. I rickerleck las' year, Miss Em, how me an' you sot 'er on fo'teen chicken aigs, an' she come off wid only but fo'

uv 'em. Two uv 'em wuz a rooster, an' two uv 'em wuz a pullet, an' ev'y las' one uv 'em — "

Aunt Em stopped her sharply. "But what 's that got to do with this morning? For goodness' sake, Sally, when you go to tell anything, *tell it,* without switching off to last year — or Adam!"

"Wallum, I jes' wanted to break it easy-lak," she answered, looking awfully solemn at Billy, "'caze I did n't wanter git nobody upsot in dey feelin's. Yer granpaw Crofferd's ole arm-cheer, whut 's set in dat cornder all dis time, wuz *turnt over,* an' layin' right ercrost dat nes', an ev'y aig in it smashed! Yassum! An' smellin' lak ev'ything! Dat 's whut it wuz! An' dat cheer could n't a-turnt itsef over needer! Nawsuh! Nawsuh!"

"Pshaw!" said Aunt Em. "The old chair simply gave way and fell. It was weak when we had it moved out of brother's room, after he — died."

But Aunt Sally knew better. "Naw 'm. Dey ain't no legs give way. Me an' Eli done looked, and dey ain't nuffin broke. Dat cheer wuz jes' nacherly turnt over by — sump'n. Ef it had a-fell, it would a-cotch de turkey-hen an' kilt 'er. Nawsuh! Sump'n skeerd 'er off 'n dat nes' fo' de cheer wuz turnt over. Eli, he 'low jes' de same."

Well, of course every one of us had to go out and see for ourselves, and sure enough, grandfather Crawford's old chair was lying right across the nest, and it certainly was a sight, all messed up with what would soon have been little turkeys.

And gracious! How it smelt! We had to hold our noses and back off. But the chair was n't broken and had n't given way at all; we could see that it was simply turned over. Back of where it had stood was an old, almost empty letter-case, and the dust showed that the doors had been opened. There was n't a lock, only a wooden button that turned, and there was nothing in the case but a few old yellow papers which were of no importance Aunt Em said. We did n't know a living soul who could be interested in those old things, and Billy and I looked at each other. We were thinking of that dim white face we saw in the window.

"Well, Billy," said Aunt Em, "your ghost seems to like rummaging; and if I could lay hands on it, 't would pay dearly for ruining that setting of eggs! Ten young turkeys lost. Will has certainly got to look into this! And now it seems to me the best thing we can do is to go in and have dinner. Get a bucket of hot water, Eli, and clean up this mess." Then her mouth snapped shut, and we went back to the house without saying a word. But it was plain that Aunt Em and Miss Harriet were thinking. Billy was thinking too.

After dinner Billy and I went out to the barrel-stave hammock, which father and Eli had made for us under the biggest magnolia in the front yard. Barrel staves make the best kind of hammocks. You string them about an inch apart on two long chains, and swing the chain-ends up to the limbs of two trees, and there you are; and you can leave them out in all kinds of weather, and they last for years. I 'd rather have our barrel-

stave hammock than ten of the kind you have to take in out of the rain.

Aunt Em had told us not to go a step further than the hammock until four o'clock at least, it was such a scorching day. I asked Billy if he really believed it was Mrs. Willingham's ghost that came to the barn. Billy was whistling a funeral hymn, and he went on whistling and nodded his head. Then I said that even if it was Mrs. Willingham, she would n't be snooping around that dirty barn loft and turning over chairs on the turkey nest.

Billy stopped whistling and said, " Yes she would too, if she wanted to. You never can tell what a woman will do," and went on whistling again. Billy was in the hammock and I was in the tree, about two limbs up. Just then I looked towards the Big Road, and there was Doctor's buggy nearly to our gate. Dr. Phil was bringing Doctor to see us, and right at once I thought of something.

" Let 's tell Dr. Phil all about it and see what he thinks, Billy," I called softly to him.

" Father told us not to talk about it to anybody, you know he did," Billy answered.

" But Dr. Phil 's not ' anybody,' " I said. " Father meant — just *people* — and Dr. Phil might tell us whether the ghost has been over to their house. You know if she comes back she would n't come here all the time and not ha'nt her own folks at all. You *know* she would n't! "

" It depends on whether anybody over there ever said they wished she 'd die," Billy answered, as if he had

thought it all over and there was no use talking to *him*. "Aunt Sally says if you ever say that about anybody, and they die, they 're sure to ha'nt you."

"Delia might have said it. She might have said it lots of times. I bet she did. Anyway, let 's tell Dr. Phil and ask him," I said, climbing down from the tree, for the buggy was 'way up the drive nearly to the steps. When they were all through saying howdy-do and all that, and were settled on the porch, I called to Dr. Phil, "Come down here and see our mocking-bird nest."

I could just imagine Aunt Em saying, "Sit still, Dr. St. John; don't pay any attention to Bea's nonsense." But I knew he would come, and sure enough he did, after a while. I told him we had some things to tell him that would take some time, and he 'd just as well make himself comfortable in the hammock, which he did. He threw off his coat and hung it on a low limb and then sat right between Billy and me. That 's one nice thing about our hammock; it does n't curl up, and three people can sit in it.

We told him every word of everything about the ghost, going back even to the night when grandfather Crawford's door shut in Aunt Em's face. And then, to make him understand, we had to go back to the time when grandfather was killed and all that.

He was awfully interested. He said Doctor had told him about the awful accident, but he had never heard of any ghost, and in his honest opinion it was n't his Aunt Fannie Willingham. He said he had two reasons for believing that. First, Mrs. Willingham would n't come

back merely to ha'nt Billy — it would be asking too much of any ghost — and she certainly had n't appeared at Doctor's house, or Delia would have known it and quit on the spot; and second, there *were n't* any ghosts. They had "gone out" ever since Dickens' "Christmas Carol"; he would n't deny that one ghost, because Dickens made it too clear for anybody to doubt, but there certainly had n't been any since. He wound up by saying, "You can set it down it 's a prowler of some kind, Billy. Just make your mind easy as to that. Your father 'll catch him some night or day. I can't imagine what he 's after, though. And now, had n't we better go back? I heard your aunt say something about strawberry nectar."

So we went up to the house, but Billy and I did n't feel sure even yet about that ghost business. It was mighty funny for just an ordinary *prowler* to be turning over grandfather's chair and flashing lights and doing things like that; but I guessed there was no use in talking about it any more and tried to put it all out of my mind.

There never was anything like Aunt Em's strawberry nectar! It looked like melted rubies, and when it was poured into long glasses all filled with crushed ice, with a thin slice of lemon and a straw — well, there 's no use in trying to tell; you 'd simply have to drink it to know.

We all noticed how much better Doctor was looking. He was not so pale, and the pain in his back was not bad like it used to be, because Dr. Phil and Delia rubbed and worked on his shoulders and spine every morning

and night, and Doctor said he was beginning to feel like a new man. Aunt Em said it was wonderful, and if he kept on improving he 'd be the spriest one of them all yet. Then Doctor and Aunt Em and Miss Harriet got to telling jokes and things that happened when they were young, and they were all so jolly and happy that it just set me to thinking.

I used to think that after you were old there was nothing to be happy about, but now I did n't believe that was true. Being old does n't keep you from being happy. Here were these old people — terribly old — not one under forty-eight, and yet they were drinking their nectar and laughing and having the best kind of time, just the same as the twins and Billy and I might do. I suppose what makes you happy is not being young or old, but just what 's in your heart and your way of thinking.

It certainly was our day for company, for directly here came Old Man Bennet for a call. He is a thin, slim old man, with a very sour face, and yet he is smiling all the time; nobody likes him much. Billy says he looks like stale tripe, and Aunt Sally says he looks like a Chessy-cat, but I never could decide what he looks like; so when he 's around I can't help just watching him and staring at him.

Father got after me about it once. "Bea, what in the nation do you find about Mr. Bennet that is so fascinating?" he said. "Whenever he is here, you stare at him like he was a caged animal, and if he speaks to you, you draw in as if you were dumb or foolish. What 's the matter with you?"

I told him I did n't know, except that Mr. Bennet gave me the stand-offs, and that people ought n't to smile and look sour at the same time. He laughed, but he told me to remember my manners whether people gave me the stand-offs or not, and that I was rather young to be criticizing the personal appearance of elderly gentlemen.

Well, Old Man Bennet came in smiling, and shaking hands with everybody, and praising Aunt Em's nectar, and saying how hot it was and how sorry he was to miss father, and in about half a minute you 'd have thought from their faces that every one of them had just heard the cotton crop had failed. Everything had been so nice and friendly before he came, and now all of Miss Harriet's pretty color had gone, and she was bent over her sewing as if that little Geraldine Jones' cap was a matter of life and death. And Doctor was looking different too. He had dropped all his joking, and there was a tight look about his mouth that reminded me a little of Aunt Em's when she snaps it shut. I never saw him look like that before. Aunt Em and Dr. Phil were natural and pleasant, but Mr. Bennet did most of the talking. Even the weather seemed to change on account of his being there. All of a sudden the glare grew a little dimmer, and it grew darker and darker, and a strong wind sprang up, and down came a shower of hail-stones almost before we knew it was going to storm.

It sent all of us scurrying in from the porch to the big hall. The hail clattered down for a few minutes and then was over, and the storm had settled into a good, steady rain by the time we had fixed ourselves comfortably in the hall.

"This makes me think of the day Mr. Crawford and Mr. Burke were killed. Does n't it remind you of that day, Mr. Bennet? — just the time of the year and the same suddenness of the storm. Only that was much worse and lasted longer." It was Miss Harriet talking, and her voice sounded queer. She was nervous too, and her hands were trembling; but maybe the lightning frightened her. She was n't any paler, though, than Old Man Bennet.

"Yes, yes," he said hurriedly, rubbing his hands together. "It was much the same kind of day, much the same. A very sudden storm, very sudden. Er — Mrs. Baxby, I hope this hail won't ruin your garden. But it 's bad for it, bad for it."

Before Aunt Em could answer, Doctor said, "That was a terrible thing. I was talking to Phil about it the other day, Bennet, and telling him that you were present at the time and narrowly missed being struck yourself. Mr. Crawford had just gone upstairs for a moment, had n't he? And was struck almost immediately after he returned."

Then Billy said something, or asked something, which had such a strange effect on Old Man Bennet that every one of us noticed it and wondered about it.

All Billy asked was, "Mr. Bennet, what did grandfather go upstairs for?" And at once Mr. Bennet's face turned a deep red, and afterwards went to a sickly yellow-white, and he glanced first from Miss Harriet to Aunt Em, and then at Doctor, and would n't look long at anybody. But he kept smiling and rubbing his hands

through it all, and began to talk about what a dreadful storm it had been, and how he would have been killed, too, if he had been three feet nearer the door, just as if he did n't hear Billy.

Of course Billy repeated the question. He has a stubborn way of doing that if you don't answer him. Then Mr. Bennet said,

"I — er don't remember, my boy. I can't seem — er — to recollect your grandfather going upstairs just at that time. I don't — er — seem to recall that. Events were so sudden and tragic that all the minor details seem to have gone quite out of my memory — quite out."

It was plain that he was flustered, and every one was looking at him. Aunt Em seemed surprised, and Doctor and Miss Harriet both had strange expressions on their faces, while Dr. Phil just looked steadily at Mr. Bennet as if he were figuring something out. We were all glad, I think, when the rain slacked, and Mr. Bennet rose and said he 'd better go before another shower came up.

"Bennet comes in occasionally, does n't he?" Doctor asked Aunt Em after he had gone, and she said yes, he stopped in now and then to see father; he had made a habit of these little visits ever since the time grandfather was killed.

Dr. Phil was looking thoughtful. Doctor and Miss Harriet seemed different too, and as soon as it was clear and a bit of sun came out, Dr. Phil drove Miss Harriet home and then came back for Doctor.

Old Man Bennet had spoiled everything.

CHAPTER XV

Puzzles

Late one afternoon in August, as I was going home from a party the Jones children had been giving, I saw something very interesting. I was glad, too, that Billy was n't with me; he had already gone because he did n't like the party very much. He said there were too many girls there, and so he and Johnny Wilbur left just as soon as they had refreshments and went over to the mill-pond to row. Boys have n't any manners.

I thought I would walk home with Mary and Carey, but at six-thirty sharp Aunt Lou sent Abe in the surrey for them. They wanted me to come too, but of course I would n't ride in Uncle George's surrey — after what he said about "punishing me himself if father did n't do it." I 'd just like to see him trying to switch me! So I was walking along by myself, and just before I got to Uncle George's front gate, I saw Dr. Phil and Katherine standing there. It was almost dark, and I was walking on the strip of grass close to the hedge to keep out of the dust, because the Big Road gets frightfully dusty in August, and I did n't want to spoil my white shoes. I did n't dream of watching Katherine and Dr. Phil, and I did n't know they had n't seen me, until all of a sudden Dr. Phil took Katherine right in his arms and kissed her!

I was walking along by myself, and just before I got to Uncle George's front gate I saw Dr. Phil and Katherine

There are low trees on each side of the gate, which hang over and make a very shady place, and he must have thought no one was near. I nearly died of shame, I was so afraid they would see me; so I slipped behind an elder bush, where I was quite out of sight, and covered up my eyes, because it is so disgraceful to watch people.

In a minute I heard Katherine running up their walk, for Uncle George's supper-bell was ringing, and then Dr. Phil passed by me, walking fast and whistling a tune. After he had turned up the lane I came out and ran home for all I was worth. I did n't care a snap then whether my shoes were dusty or not. When you 've got things to think about, you don't worry over your clothes. I felt light as a feather.

Usually I don't like to run errands alone, but the next morning, when Aunt Em sent me to the post-office to buy some stamped envelopes and a bottle of Liver Salts, I was glad, because I thought of course Katherine and Dr. Phil were engaged now, and I wanted to see how Selmer was taking it. I thought he would at least be pale, even if he had n't had time to get thin, but he was n't at all. Selmer has a color like a girl's, and his face was just as fresh and pink as ever. Some people consider him very handsome, and it 's true that his nose is about the straightest one I ever saw — straighter even than Dr. Phil's.

Father says Selmer would make a tremendous hit on the stage, just on the strength of his nose; but you never can tell whether father is in earnest or making fun about some things. At any rate Selmer's looks never did please

me; his eyes are too round and staring, and his mouth is too small. I like a mouth that is big and curly at the corners, and a square chin, like Dr. Phil's.

Selmer looked so perfectly natural that I knew he must not have heard about it, and I felt that if Katherine was fooling him, it served him just right; for what business did he have holding Pauline's hand and calling her "dear"? As I left the drug-store I almost ran into Katherine. She was on her way to spend the day with Annie May Jones, so we walked along together. To get to the Joneses you have to pass Pauline Finley's millinery shop, which is just behind the drug-store, and there, standing in the doorway talking to Pauline, was Dr. Phil. I thought of course he would come right on and join us, but he only smiled and bowed in a friendly way, and went on talking to Pauline.

It almost made me mad. I felt like I could handle a love affair myself better than that. I bet when I am grown, and in love with somebody, I won't fool around losing chances the way they did. People are expected to waste too much time being children anyway, and I don't see any use in it.

I could n't say a word, although I saw plain enough that Katherine did n't like it, from the look in her eyes; but I had to walk along and talk about the weather, just as if I were a blind infant and did n't know anything. They made me tired.

The very next time I had a chance I said to Dr. Phil, "I guess you and Katherine are engaged all right now."

And he laughed and said, "My dear young Eve, I am

afraid your perspicacity is at fault there. We 're not. On the other hand your lovely cousin still considers herself very much engaged to a person called Bennet, though I have done my best to convince her that the aforesaid little incident is of no importance when the right man comes along."

Well! Grown people *are* funny! Taking Katherine in his arms and kissing her like that, and she still engaged to Selmer! It was scandalous, and I certainly was stumped. You never know how to help people along about anything. I was disgusted, and it nearly drove me to dolls again. You can at least arrange them the way they belong, and know they 'll stay where they are put.

I did n't see so much of Dr. Phil after that for quite a while. He was too busy. He had gone over Doctor's account books and found that a lot of people all around owed him money, some of the accounts being old debts that had stood since before Doctor was hurt; and he had made a list of those who were able to pay and had gone to see every one of them. Nobody knows just what he said to them, but he collected money that Doctor never expected to see, and he never lost a friend by it.

He even gained friends and began to get patients himself. The Flannigans were always sending for him. They could n't pay, but he went anyhow, and Mrs. Flannigan just doted on him. Besides that, Mrs. McDade drove around telling everybody what a wonderful doctor he was, and her looks spoke for themselves of what he had done for her. Her face was n't so awfully round,

and she said she was losing fat right along. You could n't notice it very much, but she had scales at her house, and she weighed herself every day, so I guess she knew. Anyway she had stopped eating sweet things, and she looked better, and walked a lot more, and was beginning to show a little interest in visiting, though she would n't go to many places — only our house and Miss Harriet's and the village stores — because people were not very nice to her.

For Mrs. McDade was common, like the Flannigans; only the Flannigans were very poor, and Mrs. McDade had a good deal of money, and in Pine Grove, where most everybody is nice, you 'd just as well be dead as to be common.

One morning Aunt Em and I were over to Miss Harriet's when Mrs. McDade drove up. She was on the front seat, driving herself, and Miss Harriet went out and helped her to hitch her horse to the post.

"Where 's Becky?" Aunt Em asked when they came in, and she said she left Becky making tomato pickles.

"I don't depend on Becky so much now that my health 's getting better," she said, taking the big chair near the window, which Miss Harriet offered. "You won't believe it, Mrs. Baxby, but I 'm doin' about half my work now. I 've sent every nigger off the place but Becky and Aunt Jinny. I useter keep two extry ones to do the washin' and the back-yard work, but now I 've just put Aunt Jinny in the kitchen, and Becky does the outdoor work and the washin', and I help her with the housework. Besides that I 'tend to the chickens, and do

a good bit of the sweepin', and work a little in the garden, and walk three miles every day of my life, and I don't know when I 've felt as well. I 've cut out sweet things except the fruit right on my own place, such as green-apple sauce without much sugar; and at night I go to bed on the porch and sleep like a top, where I useter lay awake with my liver and not get a hour's solid rest all night."

She stopped because she was out of breath, and Miss Harriet said, " Why, that 's fine, Mrs. McDade, and you look so much better too. I 'm sure it 's much better for us not to eat too much sweet stuff, but when you are really fond of it, why you deserve lots of credit for giving it up."

" Well *I* don't deserve no credit," said Mrs. McDade in her awful grammar, while she fanned herself as hard as she could. " Dr. St. John gets all the credit in this case, because he 's the only doctor I ever met that had sense enough to show me just the right things to do. No doctor ain't ever appreciated the real value of my place before. I always knowed that there was certain virtues in some things, but it took that young man to point 'em out. There 's things in this world that many a know-it-all sets themselves up to say is bosh; but it 's simply *them* that don't know nothin' about it. In old times wise folks knowed it. My gran'mother did, and I always have, and this here young man does. It ain't always the oldest ones that knows the most."

She had me all mixed up, and Aunt Em and Miss Harriet looked like they were too, but it was perfectly

clear that Mrs. McDade thought there never was a doctor equal to Dr. Phil. She stayed ever so long and told us about her new common-sense shoes, two sizes larger than she ever had worn before, and how she used her father's old walking-cane when she went up to the spring, and only rested twice on the way. I had it right on the tip of my tongue to ask her if she rose on her tiptoes and slapped her ankles like Abe said, but I caught a look from Aunt Em and stopped.

"That 's very fine water," Aunt Em said. "It would benefit anyone who drank it regularly."

"No it would n't neither," Mrs. McDade answered quickly, and very much in earnest. "It 's altogether in the way you do it." Then she stopped short, like she was afraid she had said too much, and none of us knew what to think of her. Soon Aunt Em and I had to go, and we left her there rocking, and fanning herself, and talking to Miss Harriet like all forty.

At supper that night Aunt Em told father about it, and he was very much entertained.

"I wonder what kind of dope that young scamp has been giving Mrs. Mac," he said. "I 'll bet my horse against a row of pins he 's been working on her superstition and making her think there 's some kind of magic in walking to the spring and all the rest of it."

"I 'll take you on that," said Billy, quick as a shot. Not that he knew a thing about it, but, as he afterwards said, anybody would be a fool not to take up a bet where it was only a row of pins against a horse! Because he had a lot to win and nothing to lose.

Father thought it was a good joke and laughed about it. He thought it was rather sharp of Billy, but Aunt Em did n't approve of any kind of betting and said so. Father was tickled over Dr. Phil and Mrs. McDade.

"Just think of that young sprig lighting at the first shot on the only method that could reach that old bunch of stubbornness and superstition, when every doctor in the county had worked and bullied and reasoned with her in vain! It 's rich. By heck, that 's a good one!"

I thought Dr. Phil was smart to think of it, but Aunt Em did n't believe in fooling anybody. She said it was simply scandalous, and snapped up her mouth, so I was afraid to say that he was *curing* her anyway, and that was what counted.

Father and Billy never did settle that bet, because Mrs. McDade would n't tell, and Dr. Phil would only look innocent and not understand when he was asked about it; but she went straight on losing weight and getting well, to the surprise of everyone.

Dr. Haines said Dr. Phil was about to put his business out of commission, because so many people were wanting "the young doctor that cured Mrs. McDade." The bad part of it was that Dr. Phil would n't even tell *me,* after making me his partner, and having secrets with me, and all that.

All I could ever get out of him, when I begged him to tell me what he said to Mrs. McDade, was just this: "My dear, there are still some good people left in the world who are wise enough to believe in — fairies."

I told him I did n't see any use in being his partner,

if I was n't to do anything or know anything; and he said I had been the best kind of partner and had done my part well, because I started the whole thing by taking him to see her. And I had to be satisfied with that.

I was very anxious for Katherine and Dr. Phil to do something about their affair, but everything seemed to be standing still. I was taking Miss Harriet's butter over one morning, and as I knew she would be in the back yard at that time of the day, I went round the house to the kitchen porch. I could hear her talking to someone, and she was saying,

"But you must do something about it, child! What are you going to do? You can't let things stay as they are."

And then I knew it was Katherine with her, for it was her voice answering, "I don't know. I am just so happy, Miss Harriet, that I 'm letting things drift for a little while. Of course I 'm worried over having to tell Selmer — I hate that part of it. But — oh, Miss Harriet, is n't he just splendid!"

She stopped as soon as I came up, and then began talking about other things — just as if I did n't know what it was all about! When it is August, and you are going to be thirteen in November, you are not such a spring chicken as people seem to think. I knew perfectly well that Katherine had been telling Miss Harriet about being in love with Dr. Phil, and I could n't see why she had n't told Selmer the same thing and broken off that engagement. But she had n't done it. She had let things drift along because she hated to hurt Selmer, and

she felt bound to him by honor, and all the time she was loving Dr. Phil with all her heart, and she simply could n't make up her mind what she ought to do. Afterwards I found out that she felt that way about it.

I went home from Miss Harriet's feeling that things were not going right, but there was nothing I could do about it, so I tried to think of other things.

Selmer accepted that position and went to Bradford. I was glad he went, but he kept coming back to see Katherine and wanted to marry her as much as ever. Carey told me one day in the Pasture there had been a scene at their house because Aunt Lou told Katherine they must go to Bradford and do some shopping for her trousseau, and Katherine said there was no use in that, for she had about made up her mind she would n't marry Selmer.

"Then father butted in, mad as fire," Carey said, "and told Kathie he guessed that young whipper-snacker of a St. John had something to do with it, and that Dr. Phil was nothing but a loafer, not worth his salt, and could only look forward to being a country doctor; and when he married, his wife and children would go hungry." And Carey said, at that, Katherine flared up at Uncle George worse than she ever had in her life, and told him she was the one who was marrying, and she 'd do as she pleased, and she had a right to go hungry if she wanted to.

"And then you ought to have seen mother!" put in Mary.

"Yes, mother just went into histories," said Carey,

"and she was perfectly overdone." Anyone would have thought Aunt Lou was a beefsteak or something to cook, but I knew what Carey meant.

We were all on Dr. Phil's side, and we were so glad Katherine had spunk enough to stand up for herself that we began to dance around and see who could kick the highest. I did. I kicked off my own hat, which was n't so very much, for the brim was wide.

Mary held her skirts out like a stage dancer and danced around singing, "Kath-ie 's — going — to — bounce — old — Sel-mer! Kath-ie 's — going — to — bounce — old — Sel-mer! Ain't — I — glad — too-loo — loo-loo!"

Then Carey and I joined in, and I showed them how I saw some vaudeville girls dance once in Bradford when father took me to a show, and we all three danced around singing, "Kath-ie 's — going — to — bounce — old — Selmer!" We acted like little idiots, and we ought to have knocked on wood.

CHAPTER XVI

Billy and Bea and the Twins Say What They Think About It

You never do *know* about a single thing in this world. I thought from what Carey said that Katherine and Dr. Phil had quite settled their love affair, and they would soon be going together and letting everybody know it; but I never was more mistaken in my life, for everything began to go wrong.

One afternoon Katherine and Carey walked down to the drug-store to get ice-cream, and coming back, just as they reached the church, a sudden rain came up, and they ran into the church vestibule to wait until it was over. The inner church doors are kept locked, but the outer ones usually stand open; and as Katherine and Carey ran into the vestibule, who should they bump into but Pauline and Dr. Phil!

Carey said Katherine laughed and caught Pauline around the waist, saying, "Somebody else seems to be running out of the rain!"

But Pauline kind of pulled away from Katherine and would n't have much to say. Carey said there was a hurt expression in her eyes, and pretty soon she gathered up her skirt and ran out, saying she must get home before it rained harder. Dr. Phil looked a little uncertain, and

then he caught Katherine's hand and said in a hurried way, "I 'd stay with you, dear, but I had just started to walk home with Pauline when the shower came up. I 'll be sure to see you to-morrow." And then he followed Pauline in the rain.

All the way home Katherine was very quiet, but just before they got to the house she asked Carey, as a special favor, not to talk at home about their meeting with Pauline and Dr. Phil. Carey said she promised, but she had her fingers crossed, because she only meant she would n't tell the grown folks. Of course she meant to tell us, for the only way we had of keeping up with Katherine's love affairs was by finding out things for ourselves. She said Katherine would n't wait for the rain to stop before they started home, and they got very wet. It did n't hurt Carey, but it gave Katherine a sore throat.

Carey said Pauline's eyes looked like she had been crying, and we all thought it was because she had found out that Selmer cared more for Katherine than he did for her. I said I could n't see why she should want to cry for anything with staring eyes and a cat-fish mouth, like Selmer Bennet. But Carey said I need n't talk; maybe I 'd cry too if I was a desolute orphan and had to earn my living doing millineries all the time; and if somebody should step in and cut me out of my sweetheart!

"Well, for all that," I said, "I don't see why Dr. Phil is going about so much with Pauline. If I was Kathie I would n't like it at all!"

"She *did n't* like it at all," Mary then said. "She 's been looking cross and mopey all the week, and she 's refused to go to two parties."

Carey said *that* was because she had a sore throat. But Mary went on to say that anyway her father and mother had been having a good many private talks lately. They 'd talk so low you could n't hear what they said, and if anybody came around they 'd speak up louder and say something about the garden or the new roof that was being built on the barn.

"It 's a fact," Carey joined in. "You 'd think Christmas was coming, or somebody's birthday, or something."

I said they must be making up some way to get Katherine switched off from Dr. Phil, because everybody knew they wanted her to marry Selmer.

"Selmer 's richer than Dr. Phil," said Mary, with a thoughtful kind of look.

"That 's nothing. Dr. Phil 's nicer," Carey said, quick as a shot. Carey was my favorite of the twins.

We were at our wading-place in the Pasture, and all this time Billy had been fishing for minnows. Now he spoke up for the first time.

"Rats!" he said scornfully. "Anybody 'd think, to hear you kids carry on, that nobody could have a private talk about anything but some dinky little old love affair! That 's all you think about — *engagements* and falling in *love*. Lord! I 'd hate to be a girl!"

That was a story, because we never had thought anything about people being in love until all this came up about Katherine and her sweethearts. And when it 's

your own sister and your own first cousin — Billy ought to have been ashamed of himself! I told him so.

"Anyhow, I bet that's not what they were talking about," he said. "I bet it's something about the church, and somebody's started something on Mr. Peters. Maybe he's been to Bradford to a vaudeville show or a prize fight."

"Why, Billy Crawford!" I gasped; and Carey asked him what made him think that.

"Because," said Billy, putting a new crumb on his hook, "I've found out that when you see people holding councils that way, there's generally something up with the church. They always try to get things on people that are the highest up, and if Mr. Peters is not the properest person in Pine Grove, I'd like to know who is!" He wound up by betting me his purple and white pigeon it was something like that. Billy was always ready to bet, and all Aunt Em had said could n't break him of it.

"Maybe Billy's right," said Carey. "Don't you remember how they had a terrible scandal on Mr. Snagg last year about drinking so much, and how they resigned him out of the church?"

That was perfectly true; and as far as money went, Mr. Snagg certainly was high up, for he was richer than either father or Uncle George.

But somehow I could n't believe that about Mr. Peters. It was hard to see how anybody who would n't even get his mail on Sunday, and who said in such a long, solemn voice, "O Lord, our Heavenly Father," when he prayed

in church, could *possibly* go to a prize fight. Father might have gone, but not Mr. Peters. So I bet my whole bag of blue marbles against the pigeon that it was n't any church affair that Uncle George and Aunt Lou were holding councils about.

Billy went away, whistling "Just as the Sun Went Down," which is the only tune he can carry straight, even in a whistle, and then we heard Mandy calling the twins, and they ran for their lives, so as to make it look as if they had been playing back of their barn.

When I was alone I could n't help thinking what a mess grown people could make of their affairs. The more I thought of it, the more I saw that Selmer was making love to two girls at the same time; and when I remembered all I saw from the oak tree, it seemed that he looked more in love with Pauline than with Katherine. But it puzzled me why he should be begging Katherine to marry him, if he was in love with Pauline. Of course Katherine was well off, but then Old Man Bennet had money enough for Selmer to marry for love if he wanted to. And Pauline was certainly pretty enough for any man, and she was sweet and good too. There was n't a thing against her except that she was a poor girl and had to work for a living.

The girls in Pine Grove were like Katherine; they belonged to the sort of families where the girls did n't work. But while Pauline's family was not quite so good as the Crawfords — because of course we are the best people in the county — still the Finleys are every bit as good as the Bennets. For all of it I could n't see at all

why Aunt Lou, and the Joneses, and the Hitchetts, and a lot of others should draw the line against Pauline like they did, when she was just as nice looking and behaved just as well as anybody else. Even if she was a little common, she *acted* like a lady, and that 's what ought to count.

Aunt Sally says if you are *born* quality, you are quality; and if you are *born* trash, you are trash. All the old-time niggers — I mean darkies — say that. But father says if you live and act like a lady, you 're a lady; and if you act like a common person, you are simply *common* — no matter what you were born to be.

I guess father knows.

Those people would go to Pauline's little shop to get their hats trimmed, and would sit there for an hour, and talk to her sweeter than pie; then they would turn right around and give a party and not ask her. And Pauline felt it, too, and she was as lonely and unhappy as she could be. It was a shame! When Pine Grove is such a little place and there are so few young people! Katherine was always sweet to Pauline, just as she is nice and friendly to everybody, but she could n't do much against Aunt Lou and the others.

It made me furious, because when I grow up I mean to work myself. I mean to write stories and do things like that to earn money. I hate to see grown girls sit around on their fathers. I wonder if people will look down on *me?*

I guess they won't, though, because I 'm a Crawford.

CHAPTER XVII

Pauline

There were getting to be so many real things to wonder about that I had little time for my think-stories, though I was thinking one that was very interesting, whenever I could get a few quiet minutes alone. It was about seven little orphan sisters who were left without a penny, and how they earned their living selling papers and helping people nurse their babies. But every time I'd go anywhere by myself to think, things about Katherine and Dr. Phil, and Pauline, and Selmer, and the ghost, and Mrs. McDade would all come crowding into my mind, and I could n't do a thing but wonder; and most of all I wondered how those two love affairs would come out. They seemed so hopelessly mixed up.

There was Katherine engaged to Selmer, and in love with Dr. Phil at the same time, and not knowing what to do about it, because she felt honor bound to Selmer, and she believed that he loved her. If Kathie had n't been so conscientious, she would have just broken it off; but as Carey said Uncle George said, Katherine had the conscience of the whole family, as well as the stubbornness. I guess he did n't count himself in about that part of it. Of course I would n't say that to the

twins. They 'll say just anything, but they 'll get mad as fire if anybody else says a word against their father; and I 'm exactly the same way about mine.

Then there was Selmer, running back and forth between two girls, like a shuttle. And even Dr. Phil was n't doing things right. When he ought to have been by Katherine's side every minute he could, and showed that he was perfectly devoted to her, there *he* was, walking home with Pauline, and to make it worse, running after her in the rain, and *leaving* Katherine!

I asked Billy if he thought it was possible that Dr. Phil could be flirting just a little himself, and Billy answered right off the bat, "Naw! Don't be so everlastin' silly! Pauline does n't get a square deal, and Dr. Phil 's sorry for her, and treats her nice and friendly. That 's all. Any idiot could see that."

Every now and then Billy gets something right, and at once I felt that what he said was the exact truth of it. I said I only hoped Kathie would see it that way.

"Maybe she will and maybe she won't," said Billy. "There 's no telling what girls in love will think."

As if all this was n't giving me enough to think about, a few days after Carey told me about the meeting at the church door there was the most exciting news.

Pauline was missing, and no one had any idea where she was!

The last person who saw her was little Julia Hitchett. Her mother sent her over to the shop very late in the afternoon to get some ribbon. Julia said Pauline measured off the ribbon all right, and Julia left.

Old Man Bennet, who had been staying in the drug-store since Selmer left, said that Pauline usually came in and had a glass of grape-juice about supper-time; but that evening she did n't come, and he thought nothing of it until later, when she could n't be found. The next morning Miss Harriet went in to get a bunch of forget-me-nots which she needed for a child's hat. She was out of the flowers herself, and she thought she might get them from Pauline.

No one answered when she knocked, so she went in, and found no one there, but everything neat and tidy. She waited a little while, thinking Pauline would soon come in, and finally she had to leave; but she did n't think of anything being strange. Other people went in during the day, and it was the same way; they all thought Pauline had just gone out for a while, and it was the second day before people began to wonder where she could be. None of the girls in the village had seen her, and the only relatives she had were distant cousins who lived three miles away, and they said they had n't seen Pauline for weeks. Her clothes were all there, and everything in the shop and in her little back bedroom were just exactly as if she expected to be back in a minute. There were butter and eggs and a loaf of bread in her cupboard, and a lawn shirt-waist, half-finished, in her work-basket, and not a thing missing but her hat. Even her little hand-bag, with a few dollars in it, hung on a peg behind her coat. Then everybody got excited and began to inquire everywhere for her. The station agent said she had n't gone away

on the train, and he could always tell you every single person that came or went.

About six miles away there 's another station called Bell's Junction, where certain trains will stop if they are flagged; but the agent there is a cross, stupid old man, and he said a good many people had taken trains there in the last two days, but he could n't remember any special young woman with dark hair.

Some people thought she might have gone to Bradford, but almost everybody said she would n't have gone away without her hand-bag, or even a suit-case with a few clothes.

It certainly was a mystery. In just a day Pauline had disappeared as completely as if she had gone up in smoke, and there was n't a trace of her to be found. They searched and inquired for miles around, and there was n't a soul who had seen her after Julia Hitchett bought that ribbon.

Everybody was excited and dreadfully worried. They tried to find out people Pauline knew in other places, but they could learn of only one or two; and when they wrote to inquire, these people had n't seen or heard of Pauline.

Aunt Lou, and Mrs. Jones, and Mrs. Hitchett, and Miss Williams, and Mrs. Peters were driving all around to country houses, and writing letters, and making a big fuss talking about how they just *knew* something awful must have happened to that poor, dear child, and maybe she had been murdered and thrown in the pond! You 'd have thought from the way they acted that

Pauline was a near and dear relative of theirs who was lost, and not a little orphan they had treated badly.

Everything seemed to go wrong those days. Not a bit of news came from Pauline, and Aunt Em and Miss Harriet and all of them in the Charity Association were blaming themselves for not having tried to keep closer to a poor working-girl who had no family nor relatives who cared anything for her. I heard them talking about it and told Billy, and he said he hoped they were satisfied now. I had found out from Mary that Uncle George and Aunt Lou had been talking to Old Man Bennet, and it was all about Katherine marrying Selmer.

So one day at the dinner table I said, "Father, there 's not any sort of scandal about Mr. Peters or the church, is there?"

Father and Aunt Em looked perfectly astonished, and Aunt Em said, "Why, no, indeed! For heaven sake, Bea, where did you get such an idea?"

I said, "Nowhere. I was just thinking."

Then father insisted on knowing why I asked such a question, and I had to say, "Oh nothing, father. Billy and I had a bet. That 's all."

Father did n't like it at all. He said I had asked a flippant question about a person who was above reproach and most highly respected, and that he 'd better not hear of my doing it again.

I just looked straight at Billy, and he knew that I had won the purple and white pigeon.

Katherine had entirely stopped coming to the Pasture

and so had Dr. Phil, and I almost never saw them; but Billy and I and the twins still went there very often. Carey said Katherine moped around the house all the time, like she was sick, and would n't eat enough to keep a bird alive; and she was getting so pale and thin that Aunt Lou fretted and fussed about it all day. And worse still, Katherine was n't friends with Dr. Phil any more. He had called twice, and she would n't see him; but she saw Selmer when he came, though she did it as if she did n't care whether she saw him or not. The twins said it was perfectly deadly at their house, because Katherine was always the life of everything, and now you could hardly get her to smile. They said Selmer looked perfectly miserable.

And it was just as bad with Dr. Phil. I met him one morning at the post-office, and he was n't like himself at all. He walked along with me, and was cheerful and jolly as he could be, but I 'm no baby, and I could see well enough he was not happy one bit. I wanted to ask him questions, but I could see he did n't want me to, by the way he kept talking about just ordinary things — how the pair of thrushes in Doctor's garden would fly right down when he went out and whistled, and how their old speckled hen tried to adopt one of the little thrushes that had fallen out of its nest, and the mother and father birds screamed, and fought the hen, and made such a racket that he ran out and saved the little bird from being brought up like a chicken — as if he expected me to believe that! He went on telling me things like that and never mentioning Katherine, or the

Pasture, or things we used to talk about, until I was as unhappy as he was by the time we reached the lane that led to Doctor's house.

I wanted very much to ask him if he had let Katherine know about Selmer making love to Pauline. I was even going to offer to tell Kathie myself, if he thought it would look mean for him to do it. But somehow his look kept me from saying a word about it; so I decided that everybody was too much worried about not finding Pauline to be even thinking of sweethearts and things like that. I did ask him about Mrs. McDade, just to be saying something, and he said he had n't seen her lately, but he supposed she must be getting along pretty well.

For two afternoons after that it rained and I could n't go in the Pasture, but the first clear day I went, and pretty soon Mary and Carey joined me. In a minute I saw that Mary was sulky and Carey was mad about something. That was one of the ways they were different; Mary would pout and Carey would flare up. If it had n't been for their having different ways, people never could have told them apart, for they looked exactly alike. When they were mad about anything, Mary's under lip would go out. Carey's lip did n't do that, but instead a funny little flash would come in her eyes, and sometimes at home Carey would stick out her lip and pout like Mary, just to get them mixed up; but Mary never could make her eyes look like Carey's "mad eyes" as she called them.

Carey's eyes were flashing that day. "What *do* you

reckon, Bea?" she said as soon as we met. "Mary's gone and played the mischief! She told mother all about how Kathie and I saw Pauline and Dr. Phil in the church door, and about how Pauline would n't talk to Kathie and went away when we came, and how Dr. Phil followed her! After she *knew* I had *promised* Kathie not to tell! And of course mother told father, and then she told the whole of Pine Grove; that is, she told Mrs. Jones, and that's the same thing as telling the town!"

"I don't care if I did," Mary said. "When anybody's missing, you ought to tell all you know."

"Yes, but you need n't be a tattle-tale!" I snapped out, for I felt in some way that Mary's telling all that would hurt Dr. Phil. They would throw it up to Kathie that he was more interested in Pauline than he was in her, and try to set her against him.

Mary said she did n't care; her mother told her and Carey always to tell her everything, and she did n't see any use in keeping secrets when it was such a little thing as that.

Then Carey said, "All right, Miss Smarty. You 'll never get told anything else by *me!* You never did have any discussion about keeping things, and I 'll never while I live tell you another single thing!" Carey always said that whenever Mary told things. Mary's under lip was 'way out, and she went off up the Branch by herself and began to make frog-houses.

Carey said that Pauline's cousins seemed to be more

angry than uneasy about her disappearance. One of them, Mrs. Janey, told Aunt Lou that they did n't believe anything had happened to her, because she always was flighty, and they believed she had just taken a notion to go away somewhere and mysticate everybody, and that she would turn up in the course of time. Of course "mysticate" was Carey's word; she was there when Mrs. Janey was telling Aunt Lou, when they met at the general store. But I believe that was spite on Mrs. Janey's part. Pauline had boarded with the Janeys once, but they were not pleasant and Pauline was unhappy there, so she left them.

No one else thought like Mrs. Janey. Everyone said the Janeys just did n't want to bother themselves about Pauline and would n't spend any time or money in looking for her. After a week or two the excitement died down a little, but the mystery was as deep as ever.

Well, Uncle George and Aunt Lou managed to make Katherine believe that Dr. Phil was a flirt. Worse still, people got out a report that Pauline had gone to Chicago to go on the stage! Everybody knew that a few years ago, when Pauline was visiting in Chicago, she had an offer to go on the stage, and she very nearly accepted, and then somebody persuaded her out of it. So now people were bringing all that up again, and saying that was exactly what must have become of her; and as if *that* was n't enough, they were actually saying that Dr. Phil had encouraged her to do it! And all that just because Dr. Phil had been with Pauline a few

times, and he was one of the last people who saw her, and somebody had once heard them talking about a play that was making a big hit in Chicago. And those people seemed to think that going on the stage was the wickedest thing in the world!

So that settled Dr. Phil.

They had Katherine thinking he had influenced Pauline to slip away, because if she let people know, they would have tried to keep her from it.

I can't understand why Katherine should have believed all those things, because generally she is so sensible and looks at the best side of things. But as Billy says, you never can tell what a person in love will do or how they will look at things. If I had a lover, I 'd stand square up for him, no matter what people said. Katherine ought to have been spunky, like she was when she told Uncle George she 'd go hungry if she wanted to. But instead of that she simply wilted like a broken flower, and got white and thin, and let Uncle George and Aunt Lou do what they pleased with her; and the upshot of it all was that she was going to marry Selmer the first of October.

I wanted to tell Katherine I knew it was n't true that Dr. Phil would do anything mean. Anybody with sense could look at him and see that. I saw it the minute I laid eyes on him. But Carey said it was n't any use talking to Katherine, because she and Mary had tried to tell her some things, and she only looked tired and told them to run along, they did n't know anything about it. And Carey said Katherine and Selmer were

the miserablest looking going-to-be-married couple she ever hoped to see.

A month had gone by and nothing had been heard of Pauline. Billy said he did n't believe she had run away at all. He believed she had been kidnaped, and so he and Johnny Wilbur and some other boys had formed a band of private detectives, and they had searched every nook and cranny of the woods for miles around, looking for places where bandits might have their dens.

I wanted to join them, but Billy said no, girls would be in the way. So I made up my mind that if I could n't do anything else, I would at least stand up for Dr. Phil. I would tell people that Selmer Bennet was the one who was in love with Pauline, and if she really had gone on the stage, Selmer would be the one who knew about it and not Dr. Phil. I knew that Katherine and Uncle George and Aunt Lou would hear of it, and I hoped it would open their eyes about Selmer. I never had mentioned those things to Miss Harriet or to father or Aunt Em, because they were already Dr. Phil's friends, and they did n't believe he had anything to do with that stage story. Goodness knows I 've always hated a tattle-tale, but I was determined just the same to tell what I knew about Selmer.

I had a chance to do this sooner than I expected. One day father was going to Bradford, and Aunt Em decided that she would go too and do some shopping. She wanted new curtains for the dining-room; and I had to have new school dresses, for school would be

opening soon; and Billy had to have waists and shoes. Father said I might go along with them if I wanted to, and of course I was crazy about going; and he said he would get Dr. Phil to come over and spend the night with Billy. We were to leave at ten o'clock in the morning, and we 'd get back at twelve the next day.

When we drove over to the station, the first person I saw was Mrs. McDade in her surrey, just outside the waiting-room. She had come over to get an express package and was waiting for the train. Father and Aunt Em and I spoke to her, and then we went into the station and found that the train was a few minutes late; so I told Aunt Em I would go and sit in the surrey with Mrs. McDade until the whistle blew.

Mrs. McDade seemed to be glad to have me, and began to ask me questions and talk about things that were not important; but I did n't have any time to waste, so I went right at what was on my mind.

"I thought you were Dr. Phil's friend, Mrs. McDade," I said.

She stared at me for a second and then said, "His friend? Of course I 'm his friend. What do you mean, child?"

"Well, I always thought friends stood up for each other," I answered. "And it seems to me that now while people are telling stories on him, if you are his friend, it 's the right time to show it. Instead of that you have n't sent for him for weeks, and when you drove over to Doctor's last week for that liniment for Aunt Jinney's rheumatism, Delia says you would n't

stop to talk, but just hurried away like you were afraid you 'd be poisoned!"

I knew it was outrageous to speak to a grown person that way, but I just could n't help it. So I went on as fast as I could, before she could stop me, and told her it was a perfect shame for people to be saying that Dr. Phil had encouraged Pauline to go on the stage, and that he did n't know a thing about it. And if Pauline told anybody she was going to Chicago, she was more likely to have told Selmer Bennet, for had n't I with my own eyes seen Selmer making love to her at the twins' party, and did n't he call her "dear" and hold her hand? I pitched in and told everything I knew about it in a hurry, and she stared at me in the strangest way, and her eyes grew bigger and bigger. When I was so out of breath I had to stop a minute, she said, with a kind of gasp, "You don't mean to tell me that people are sayin' that Pauline 's gone on the stage? An' that Philip St. John advised her to do it?"

"Yes, they do say it," I answered. "And they think it was fairly wicked for her to frighten people so, and they blame Dr. Phil for encouraging her, and they say he 's a flirt, and it 's just breaking Katherine's heart!"

Then Aunt Em called me and I had to go, for the train was coming. But as I got out of the surrey I begged Mrs. McDade not to believe that about Dr. Phil, but to go on being his friend. She patted me on the shoulder and said, "You 're a dear child, Bea. I *will* be his friend; yes, I certainly will." And her voice sounded so hearty that I could n't help feeling better.

But it seemed strange that she had n't heard all that. It showed that even if she was common, she was n't so much of a gossip as a lot of other people were, and was n't always on the lookout for tales, and I liked her better than I ever had before.

CHAPTER XVIII

Events Come Thick and Fast

We had the finest kind of time in Bradford. I love the crowds everywhere, and the street cars, and long rows of electric lights. It was perfectly lovely, shopping with Aunt Em in the big stores where you can get lost as easy as anything; but when father took us to see a play that night, I never was so happy and excited in my life; at least I thought so then, but I always feel that way when something very new and nice happens.

Father has lots of friends in Bradford, and he was invited out to dinner, but he did n't accept the invitation, just to take us to the theater. It seemed very funny to me to have dinner at night, but in Bradford everybody does it. I asked father when they had supper, and he laughed and said, well, supper crowded pretty close on to what ought to be the breakfast hour, with a good many people in Bradford, and that seemed to me funnier than ever. I used to think that everybody in every place had breakfast at seven-thirty, dinner at twelve-thirty, and supper at six-thirty, like we do in Pine Grove.

The next morning we left at half-past ten and got home at twelve. The Charity Association was to meet with Aunt Em at four o'clock, and she had bought some

lovely little party-cakes from a big baker-shop, so that she would have nothing to do about her refreshments but make tea. Selmer Bennet came over on the train with us, but he only spoke to us a minute, and then went into another coach. When we reached Pine Grove, Old Man Bennet was at the station. He nodded to us, and then took Selmer's arm, and they hurried off.

"Wonder what's the matter with Bennet?" father said, meaning the old man. "He looks like he had the jaundice."

"He does look yellow — and strange too — but then he never did look like a Christian creature ought to look, to me," said Aunt Em.

Billy drove up in the surrey just then to meet us, and I never saw anything act like he did. The minute I saw him I knew something had happened, because his eyes were so big, and he gave me such a knowing stare. After I got into the front seat with him, and all the way home, he kept winking at me, and rolling his eyes up, and stepping on my foot, until I was nearly crazy to know what he meant. But he didn't let father or Aunt Em see any of these signs. He answered their questions naturally enough, and told them yes Dr. Phil had spent the night and had left early that morning.

"Old Man Bennet spent the night, too," he added in a careless kind of way, like it was a perfectly common thing for Mr. Bennet to be spending the night at our house!

"Mr. Bennet!" said father and Aunt Em almost together. And Billy said yes, Mr. Bennet dropped in

after supper, not knowing father was away, and he got to feeling so bad that he decided he 'd have to spend the night. And Dr. Phil had been called over to see Mrs. McDade, so Aunt Sally put fresh sheets on the bed in the little room back of the parlor, so that Mr. Bennet need n't climb the stairs, and he went to bed before Dr. Phil got back from Mrs. McDade's, and then left before breakfast the next morning. Billy told it off as if it was an everyday thing, like one of the hens coming off with twelve chickens, or the cow getting hold of bitter-weed and spoiling the milk, but all the time he was mashing my foot and winking at me on the sly.

"Humph! That 's funny," said father; and Aunt Em said she should think it *was* funny!

As soon as father and Aunt Em got out of the surrey, and Billy and I had driven on to the barnyard, I asked him to tell me quick what it was he knew; but he would n't tell me a thing until we had climbed up on top of the barn roof, where he knew nobody could hear. We sat on a little propped-up place just under the pigeon-cote, and then he said,

"Bea, there 's so much to tell I don't know how to start, but — say! what do you reckon? The ghost showed up again last night, and Dr. Phil and I both saw it! And as long as you live, Bea, you could never imagine what that ghost looks like when you 're close to!"

"Good gracious mercy!" I said, because I could n't think of another thing to say. And when I got over

the first shock, I asked him what it looked like and where they saw it.

But Billy said, "Never mind about that, because after all, the ghost doesn't come first." And then he told me all about it, and I never heard of anything so exciting, outside of a book. But he was getting things mixed so, telling parts here and parts there, that I told him just to go back and start right from the time father and Aunt Em and I left, and tell straight on up to the time we got back.

And this is the way it was. As soon as we got out at the station, Billy drove the surrey back home and put up the horse. Then he helped Eli about the barn until Aunt Sally called him in for his dinner. While he was eating, a boy brought a note from Dr. Phil, saying that he would be in the country all the afternoon on business and might not get back early, but that he would be over to have supper and spend the night. So Billy thought he would go and spend the afternoon with Johnny Wilbur, and he left almost as soon as he ate his dinner, and didn't get back until nearly six.

Dr. Phil came in a few minutes later and said he had been out to see the three littlest Flannigans, who were sick with the whooping-cough, and found Mrs. Flannigan down with acute indigestion. She was very sick, he said, and he stayed until she was much better and a neighbor had come in to help about the children. Afterwards he had stopped at a farm on a little business for Doctor.

"So you see I've been a busy person to-day, Billy,"

he said. "And after supper I 've got to leave you for a while and go up to see Mrs. McDade. I 'm afraid she 's made herself sick again, for she 's sent over to Doctor's for me twice to-day, and the last time she left word for me to come to her house as soon as I got back." He said he 'd go right after supper, and would try not to stay long, and hoped he could get back in time for a game of checkers or set-back.

Billy said he told him that was all right, and he 'd get Aunt Sally to play checkers with him until he got back. So Dr. Phil went off to Mrs. McDade's in father's little cart, and Billy was trying to teach Aunt Sally how to play checkers; but she could n't see the difference between moving straight and moving cat-a-cornered, and every time he 'd try to explain about moving a piece she 'd say, "Well, *whut fer* does you do it?"

Billy was about to give it up when the door-bell rang. It was Old Man Bennet come to call on father. He ought to have known father was n't there; everybody in Pine Grove knows when anybody goes away, even for a day. But he always was stupid about coming the very day father was away, and worrying Aunt Em, and looking like he was expecting nobody knew what.

Well he sat down and talked to Billy and said he 'd wait a little while and chat with Dr. Phil when he came in; Billy had told him father was away and Dr. Phil was going to spend the night. After a while Mr. Bennet said he felt faint, and asked for a glass of water. Aunt Sally got it for him, and then he put his hand to his side, and said he was feeling very ill, and doubted if

he was able to go home. Billy told him to lie down on the couch, and as soon as Dr. Phil came, he would drive him home in the cart; but Mr. Bennet said he was feeling so bad he thought he 'd have to go to bed at once, if it would n't be too much trouble for him to sleep there. Well of course Billy invited him to spend the night, and told him it would be no trouble because we had lots of room, and besides Dr. Phil could do something for him when he came.

So Mr. Bennet thanked Billy and asked to be helped upstairs; but Aunt Sally said there was n't a bit of use in his climbing the steps, because he could sleep in the little room back of the parlor, for it was all ready to use, and she had nothing to do but put sheets on the bed. Grandfather's old room upstairs is our best room for guests, and Billy said he noticed at the time that Mr. Bennet looked kind of funny when the little room was offered, but after a minute he said, "Oh, of course, any room will do."

Aunt Sally fixed the sheets, and he went to bed, and told them not to bother about him, because he 'd be all right after he got quiet; that he often had little spells like that, and lying down and being left undisturbed was all he needed.

"He looked sick this noon at the station when he met Selmer," I said.

And Billy answered, "You bet he was sick! But he was n't sick last night. He was playing 'possum, because he wanted to stay all night. Oh yes; he 's sick *to-day* all right. You bet he is!"

Of course I did n't understand, but Billy went on and said that Mr. Bennet was fast asleep when Dr. Phil finally came in, and they did n't wake him. After Mr. Bennet had gone to bed Billy and Aunt Sally tried the checkers again, but they both got sleepy, and when Dr. Phil came it was ten-thirty, and Billy was asleep on the lounge and Aunt Sally was nodding in a chair. Dr. Phil thanked her for waiting with Billy, and then she went out to her little room behind the kitchen. Billy said Dr. Phil did n't say a thing about why he was so late — he had been gone over three hours — and when Billy told him about Mr. Bennet, he went in the room and turned up the light, then he looked at him and felt his pulse. When Mr. Bennet slept right on without moving, Dr. Phil turned down the light again and said, " Well, let him sleep."

Sleepy as Billy was, he noticed that Dr. Phil was very quiet, and his mouth was set, and there was a strange look in his eyes. Billy asked about Mrs. McDade, and he said, like he was thinking about something else, " Oh, she is n't sick much."

Then they went upstairs. Dr. Phil was to sleep in father's room, so that Billy would not feel lonesome, for there 's a door between the two rooms. Billy undressed and lay across his bed, but he was all wide awake again and could n't go to sleep.

Dr. Phil was wide awake, too, and did n't undress at all, except to take off his coat and collar; Billy could see him through the door. After a while he looked in and seemed to think Billy was asleep; then he put out

his light and sat down by his open window. There was moonlight, and Billy could see him quite plain. Billy said he dropped off to sleep after a while, but it was very hot, and he was restless, and would wake every now and then, and Dr. Phil would still be sitting there by the window.

Finally he woke and found that he was about to perish for a drink of water. There was not so much light now, but Billy could see that Dr. Phil had finally lain down across the bed, though he was still dressed. Billy said he wondered then if Dr. Phil always slept in his clothes. He crept to the water pitcher, and was getting his drink without making a sound, when clear and sudden, out of the dark, still hall, there came a little click!

In a second Dr. Phil was on his feet and had slipped quick as a cat to the door going into the hall. Billy crept up behind him, and Dr. Phil reached back and put his hand over Billy's mouth, and of course that meant he was to keep very quiet. Everything in the hall was black and still, and when the clock downstairs suddenly boomed out three, Billy said his heart nearly jumped out of him. They stood listening for a moment, then Dr. Phil raised his hand, and a white light flashed over the hall. Billy saw then that he had a flashlight in one hand and a revolver in the other.

There was nothing in the hall. Everything was just as usual, except that grandfather Crawford's room door was shut, and it always stood open, to keep the room aired.

Dr. Phil shut off his pocket-light, and Billy pulled

him down and whispered in his ear, "That was grandfather's door being locked. It always clicks like that." Dr. Phil crept up the hall, with Billy right behind him, until he reached the closed door. Then he looked for a long time through the keyhole.

"Someone in there with a light," he whispered to Billy. Then very softly and carefully he tried the door-knob, and sure enough the door was locked.

Billy said he could n't help thinking of the night when that door shut and locked right in Aunt Em's face, and yet never a sign of anything was found in the room.

There was no other way to get in except through a window opening on the porch, and it was to this window they crept, Billy still following closely behind Dr. Phil. They found the shutters closed and the shade drawn down low. Billy drew Dr. Phil aside and whispered to him that the catch was broken and the shutters could be pulled open from the outside.

Dr. Phil tried one carefully; it was loose and swung back without the least noise. Then with the greatest caution he opened the other shutter, working very slowly, just an inch at a time, so that there would n't be a sound, until finally he had both shutters open wide and nothing between them and the inside of the room but a shade and a thin lace curtain. And the shade lacked half an inch of reaching to the edge of the window-sill!

There was a tiny crack, and Dr. Phil knelt on the porch and looked through. Of course Billy did the same, and he said it almost keeled him over when he saw — *Old Man Bennet!*

He was standing before a medicine closet which was built into the wall close by the mantelpiece, and as he turned a pocket flashlight here and there on the closet shelves, the light once showed his face distinctly. After a while he shut the closet door, and then he turned to a little sewing-table that used to be grandmother's. It had three drawers, and he took them out one by one, and looked into them and into the spaces back of them; then he felt the bottom of the table as if he thought there must be another drawer. He went from place to place the same way, and finally began to search through our old family Bible, which always stayed on a little table in a corner of the room. The Bible was in a rosewood case, and he opened the case, and took the book out, and laid it on a chair; then he placed his little light on the table so that he could see, and began to go through the papers that were between many of the leaves. Billy and I had seen them all. They were mostly old family letters, and notices of deaths and marriages, and things like that.

While he was busy with the Bible his back was towards the window where Billy and Dr. Phil were watching.

After a while Dr. Phil got up softly, and drew Billy aside, and whispered, "Go back to your room, Billy, and stay until I come or call you. This is something I can manage better alone."

And Billy whispered back, "Is he crazy?"

And Dr. Phil said, "No, only looking for something." And he gave Billy a little shove, and told him to go right along, and then he went back to the window.

When Billy promises anything, you can always count on him; but if he does n't promise, you can just look out. Billy said he did n't promise, and he had no notion of going to his room like a little coward or a baby.

He believed Old Man Bennet was crazy, and he meant to stay near Dr. Phil. Anyway, Billy said, it was happening in our house, and he had a right to know what was going on. So he only went as far as the hall door, and when he saw Dr. Phil push the shade inward very softly, and then step swiftly over the low sill into the room, he flew back to his old place and watched under the edge of the shade. We both supposed Dr. Phil did n't run the shade up because he did n't want to make a noise before he got into the room.

Billy said Dr. Phil was standing there with his light full on Mr. Bennet, and the old man had sprung to his feet and was facing him, as white as a sheet and with a wild look in his eyes. Then Dr. Phil spoke, and his voice was clear and cold as ice, but very polite. Billy said it made him think of father's. Dr. Phil told Mr. Bennet he was staying in our house in father's place, and that he felt obliged to ask him what he was searching for.

I never knew until then how well Billy could describe anything. He told it all so that I saw the whole thing, just as if I had been there peeping under the shade.

Mr. Bennet never said a word. He just stood, staring, while Dr. Phil went on in his polite way, and asked him if it was records he was looking for, and told him he had been living near father so long he surely ought

to know all the records of the Crawford family. Then he stepped up closer and quietly took a paper out of Mr. Bennet's hand. He looked at the paper and said something about old insurance policies, and that he was sure it was n't old policies Mr. Bennet wanted; and he got still more polite and told Mr. Bennet that if he would wait until the next day, father would be back, and *he* might help him to find what he wanted, as he probably knew more about his private papers than anyone else did. Then he added, in a queer sort of way, that maybe, in this case, father *did n't* know so much.

Billy said, at that, Mr. Bennet fired up and said he was insulted! He was an old family friend of father's, he said, and Dr. Phil was just a stranger and did n't know what he was talking about! And he went on like he was furious, saying that just because he felt restless and could n't sleep, and went up to grandfather's old room to simply look over some old newspaper clippings, why Dr. Phil must come blustering in as if he were a common burglar!

Then Dr. Phil smiled and told him that would n't go down, and Billy said he fired questions at Old Man Bennet like peas out of a popgun. Did he always lock doors when he read old clippings? Was it a search for old clippings that brought him there in the dead of night years ago, when Aunt Em and Aunt Sally were so scared and took him for a burglar? I was so surprised at that, I could n't help breaking in and asking Billy if Mr. Bennet was really the ghost. He did n't answer my

question, but went right on and said Dr. Phil then asked about the times when Old Man Bennet had been to the barn, and if he went *there* to read clippings, when his flashlight was frightening Aunt Sally nearly to death, and when he had her going into fits over "a Black Thing floating around a corner?" And about the time he turned over grandfather's big chair on the turkey nest, trying to get at an old letter-case!

"*Was* he the ghost we saw, Billy?" I insisted on knowing, and Billy said, "Yep. He was the ghost all right. He 's got a dead cinch on the ghost business."

Billy said Old Man Bennet could n't say a word. Then Dr. Phil went right on and told him he knew all about how this search had been going on for years, and Mr. Bennet was pale and wild-looking, and caught at the back of a chair, and looked sick sure enough then, and no 'possum about it!

Then Dr. Phil laid his flashlight and revolver on the table and drew up chairs, and they sat down facing each other. But first he felt Mr. Bennet's pockets to see if he had a gun, and told him he must excuse *his* revolver, for when he came to grandfather's room he did n't know but what he had a burglar to tackle.

And Mr. Bennet said of course he was not armed; *he* was no murderer, whatever Dr. Phil might be! And he flared up again and wanted to know what right Dr. Phil had to be holding him up like that, when it was well known that *he* was a low-down scamp and had persuaded an innocent young girl to give up respectable work and go to a wicked city to act and dance on the

stage! And had the girl slipping away and frightening a whole community for fear she had been murdered!

That's the way the old man talked. But Dr. Phil looked straight at him, and smiled a little, and said —

Billy broke off there and said to me, "Bea, just *guess* what he said! While you live you'd never guess it!"

Of course I couldn't guess it.

I was sitting with my chin on my knees, and my arms around my legs, and I was so interested and excited that I was drawn up into a tight ball, and I had almost forgotten to breathe.

"*Go on,* Billy! Don't stop to talk to me!" I said.

Then Billy took it up where he left off. Dr. Phil looked straight at Mr. Bennet and said that Pauline Finley was no more in Chicago or on any stage than Mr. Bennet himself was. And more than that, she never had run away from Pine Grove at all, and was safe and well! He could vouch for it.

Gloriana! When Billy told me that, I was so utterly astonished that I uncurled myself too suddenly and came near sliding off the roof. I was asking about forty questions, when Billy said, "All that can wait, Bea. Just stop and think a minute. There was Old Man Bennet right under Dr. Phil's thumb; he had him right where he wanted him. And there was Dr. Phil knowing that Pauline was safe and somewhere near. Don't you see his Jim-dandy chance?"

I couldn't see what he meant. "Whose Jim-dandy chance?" I asked.

"Why Dr. Phil's of course. Haven't you got any

gumption?" said Billy impatiently. "If ever a man was in love, ain't he in love with Katherine? And here 's Katherine about to marry Selmer because she 's grouchy on Dr. Phil; and Selmer marrying her because his father 's making him, while he 's really in love with Pauline and just has n't got spunk enough to go after the girl he 's stuck on!"

Billy uses awfully common slang.

"Now don't you see," he went on, "there was Dr. Phil's chance to get Katherine? He never had a thing to do but just make Old Man Bennet promise to let Selmer and Pauline marry — they 'd both be willing if they had a chance; and he could have told him, if he did n't promise, that he would have him arrested for a burglar, or at least that he would tell everybody in the county about catching him snooping around in grandfather's room, and about the other times he had been sneaking about on our place in the night. He could have made him do *anything,* because I never saw anybody look sicker or scareder than Old Man Bennet did. But did Dr. Phil do it? Nixie." Billy finished up like he was disgusted with the whole world.

"Of course he did n't," I said. "You might have known he would n't do that."

Billy flared up and said, "I 'd like to know why! Just *why?*"

"Because," I said. "Just because he would n't." I did n't know why myself, but I had a feeling that Dr. Phil would n't do that, not even for Kathie.

"*Because* ain't any reason," Billy said. "But any-

way, he didn't take his chance at all." And he said Dr. Phil just told Mr. Bennet that the matter was none of his personal business, and that he would keep out of it if Mr. Bennet would promise to tell father the whole thing right away; but otherwise he would have to tell father himself. He would have to tell him all about how Mr. Bennet poisoned Ben, so that he could get to the barn loft, and everything else that he knew about it — and maybe he knew more than Mr. Bennet thought he did.

Billy said he had been feeling kind of sorry for the old man, but when he found out who poisoned Ben, and saw Old Man Bennet looking so mean and guilty, he got over being sorry in a minute, and he was mad as blazes. After a little Old Man Bennet broke down, and said in a tired kind of way that he himself would tell father all about it.

As soon as he did that, Dr. Phil spoke up in a friendlier way and told the old man to lie down on the bed and rest, while he went down and got the horse and buggy ready to drive him home; and he said he would stop by the kitchen and make coffee, for they both needed it. Billy said he jumped up then from his listening-place outside the window, and tried to get back to his room without being seen; but he couldn't make it.

Dr. Phil came into the hall just as Billy ran in, and they bumped together. He drew Billy aside and whispered, "You've been listening, Billy. I thought that was likely." Billy said he felt about as big as fifteen cents and didn't answer a word.

Then Dr. Phil led him a little farther off down the hall, but where grandfather's door was in sight, and started to say something, when Billy broke in and said suppose Mr. Bennet should leave the room by the window and slip out down the back stairs. But Dr. Phil said that was all right; he had locked the back-stair door. Then he told Billy not to say a word to anybody about all that happened until they talked it over again; but just to keep quiet a while, and when father came, just to mention in a careless way that Mr. Bennet had dropped in for a little call, and as he was feeling bad he spent the night, and being better the next morning, he left early. He wanted Billy to promise not to say another thing to anyone. But Billy said he knew he 'd burst wide open if he had to keep such tremendous things from *everybody,* so he promised not to tell a soul but me, and he 'd make me promise not to tell. That was very nice of Billy, and Dr. Phil said all right; he knew he could trust me.

Then he told Billy to watch the room while he was getting the buggy ready, and if Mr. Bennet tried to leave, to call him at once. He said he did n't want Mr. Bennet to get out of sight until he was sure he did n't have any of father's papers with him. We did n't know how he was going to manage that part of it. But Billy said he watched through the window, and Mr. Bennet did n't make any such move. He sat for a while just as Dr. Phil left him, and then he went over to the bed and laid himself across it.

As soon as Dr. Phil left, Billy said a perfectly grand

idea came to him. He made up his mind that *he* would use the chance Dr. Phil had turned down. He told me the grand idea, and I certainly was surprised. I 'd never have thought it. I could n't have *believed* that Billy Crawford would mix himself up with any love affair!

But here 's what the idea was and here 's what he did. He stepped right in the room through the window and walked up to Mr. Bennet, who jumped up quick, and sitting there on the edge of the bed, Billy said he was the most surprised and nervous-looking old man anybody ever saw. He was mad, too, and called Billy a very bad name, and asked him if he was another one come to spy, and then run off and tell!

Billy said he could n't waste any time getting mad, so he simply pitched in and told Mr. Bennet he knew everything Dr. Phil knew; and then he looked mysterious and added "And maybe *more,* Mr. Bennet."

And when he said that, Old Man Bennet turned red, and then white, and Billy went on, saying, "I know father and Dr. Phil are so kindhearted that they might be willing to keep all this to themselves, and try not to let it hurt you anyway; but I got a hunch, Mr. Bennet, that I 'm likely to spread the tale all over this whole county, and have everybody looking down on you like you was a toad — if you don't promise me something, and keep your promise too, good and well."

I was shocked. The *idea* of Billy talking to an old man like that! And in his own house too!

Well, Billy said he kept right on, and told him about

how Katherine and Dr. Phil were in love, and Selmer and Pauline were the same, and all four of them were miserable because *he* was egging Selmer on to marry Katherine. "Everybody knows," Billy told him, "that Selmer is afraid to do anything you tell him not to, on account of your money; and if you've got so much money, why don't you let your son marry the one he's stuck on? Ain't Pauline good enough for him? She's a nice girl, and a pretty one too, even if she is poor."

Billy said he just spoke out and said what he thought, and the old man stared and stared at him, and then said in a sneering way, "If Philip St. John's in love with Katherine, and knows where Pauline is, why didn't *he* try to hold me up about Selmer's marrying Pauline? Hey?"

And Billy said he answered straight off, "'Cause he's a gentleman, and he wouldn't take advantage of anybody." And Mr. Bennet said, still sneering, "And *you* are not?"

But Billy said he wasn't going to be switched off by any sneering, and he answered, "No, I ain't. I'm just a boy. And I'll tell it everywhere, if you don't promise. More'n that, I'll go straight and tell Kathie about how you are makin' Selmer marry her, when he loves Pauline; and that'll fix *that* match, I guess!"

Well, sir, Billy certainly had him. After a while he got to begging the old man — Billy can have a very wheedling way when he wants to — and telling him how miserable Selmer would be married to one girl when he was in love with another, and how unfair it was to

all four of them, and how Dr. Phil had acted like a gentleman when he had him in his power, and had not tried to get anything out of him about letting Selmer marry Pauline — and you would n't believe it, but Old Man Bennet finally gave in and promised. Not only that, but he said he 'd get it all done right at once. He 'd telegraph Selmer to come home by the noon train, and if Pauline was willing, he 'd have the marriage fixed up the very next day! And he asked Billy if *that* would satisfy him. He was certainly anxious for the tale not to get out, and Billy gave his solemn word that what he knew would never go beyond our family.

I asked him how he ever had the nerve to go through all that, and he said all he had to do was to think of Kathie, getting whiter all the time and thin as a shadow; and besides that, he said Pauline had been good to him. He was playing with some boys one morning on the way to school; they were near her little shop, and he fell off a fence and snagged his leg and tore a great hole in his pants. Pauline called him in and washed his cut and bound it up, and then she tacked the edges of the torn place together so that it hardly showed, and he could go on to school. If she had n't, he would have had to go back home, and change his pants, and catch it from Aunt Em. So of course when he had a chance to do something for Pauline, he was going to do it.

Well, after he got Mr. Bennet's promise, Billy said he felt like he could afford to be a little more friendly, so he said, " Mr. Bennet, you just be square to Selmer

and Pauline, and I won't let Dr. Phil know a word about how I came in here and threatened to tell. He can just think, like other people, that you simply changed your mind and are letting Selmer and Pauline marry because you want to. It 'll all be up to you." And before Mr. Bennet could answer, Billy went out again by the window, for he had heard Dr. Phil moving around downstairs.

Then Billy took his old watching-place, and when Dr. Phil came in the room Old Man Bennet spoke up at once with a kind of deceitful smile and said he had decided that the best thing all around would be for Selmer to marry Pauline, and he wanted to leave right away and get a telegram off to Selmer, and he told Dr. Phil it was about time for him to say where Pauline was, if he knew so much about it. Dr. Phil was surprised, and he looked hard at Old Man Bennet, as if he thought there might be some trick up, and then he told him, if he was in earnest, there 'd be no trouble about getting Pauline. And then they went downstairs and had coffee, and a few minutes later drove off in father's buggy.

Billy said it was then broad day, and he was too excited to go to bed again; so he went down and stretched out on the lounge in the dining-room to wait for Aunt Sally, and he must have dropped off, for the next he knew she was standing over him making a great fuss. He had an awful time trying to explain what he was doing there in his night-gown, and about the coffee things, and why Dr. Phil and Mr. Bennet had gone off before breakfast.

"Maybe you thinks you 'se a-foolin' me wid all dat tale," she said to Billy, "but I smells sump'n. I sho' does!"

And when, about an hour later, a boy brought father's horse and buggy back and said Dr. Phil sent him, Aunt Sally was still more suspicious. She told Billy he need n't be trying to fool her, she knew some kind of devilment was up, and she was going to tell father the minute he came.

Of course she did n't know a thing about it.

CHAPTER XIX

Mrs. McDade Brings News

Billy could n't get any farther than that because Aunt Sally called us, and we had to go in to dinner. It made me feel very funny to be knowing so much, when father and Aunt Em did n't know a thing. But they thought it was quite strange for Dr. Phil and Mr. Bennet to be going away so early, and father asked Billy where they went. At that Billy did n't exactly *tell* one, but he *hinted* the biggest whopper you ever heard of, and said maybe Mr. Bennet, being so sick, thought he 'd rather be at his own house, and Dr. Phil went along to take care of him.

"But why has n't Philip been back to tell us about it, if the old man is sick? It 's one o'clock," father said.

"You can search me," Billy said, and he looked more innocent than any angel. I was proud of him.

After dinner father said he was going over to Doctor's to see if he knew what was up, and Billy went off to the village to find out if anything was out yet. I would have gone too, but I knew the Charity Association was coming, and I thought there might be a chance that Katherine would come, because she and Dr. Phil had said they were coming to the next meeting, which would have been at the Hitchetts', only Mr. Hitchett

was sick. And now that it was to be at our house, I just wondered if Katherine would keep her word and come anyway. Of course I didn't look for Dr. Phil.

I helped Aunt Em dust the parlor and fix fresh flowers, and then I went out on the porch to wait, and all the time my head was going round with asking questions to itself. Where was Pauline? Where had she been? How did Dr. Phil find out so much about Old Man Bennet? And when was Selmer going to marry Pauline? What was it Old Man Bennet was looking for? And *how* did Dr. Phil know about his being the ghost all those other times, and the turkey nest, and all that? And if Selmer and Pauline married, would Katherine marry Dr. Phil at once, to show him how sorry she was for not believing in him? All these questions and many more buzzed round and round in my head, until the ladies began to come for the meeting. Katherine didn't come, and I lost all interest in it, but Aunt Em had told me not to go away because I must help her serve the tea at five o'clock. So when the time came for Mrs. Peters to read, I thought I'd just as well go and listen as to sit on the porch and do nothing. Of course Aunt Em didn't call me until they had got through with all their talking and had told all the news they knew; but I didn't care, because I knew that if I wanted to I could tell things that would make their hair curl with astonishment, and I felt like I was really the most important person in that room.

"What's the subject of the sketch to-day?" Aunt Em asked Mrs. Peters. Before she could reply there came

a great clatter outside. Some of us ran to the window; it was Becky, driving lickety-split up to the front door, with Mrs. McDade in the surrey. Aunt Em went to the door to meet her, but she brushed right by without waiting to be asked, and came in the parlor, and dropped down into the biggest chair she could find. For a second or two she glared all around with such a fierce expression that everybody forgot there was to be a reading and everything else.

Then she said, "I 've hurried until I 'm plum' out of breath and dead beat! I wanted to be the first to tell you, before it leaked out; and what I 've went through this day, only the good Lord knows!" She was boiling, and blazing, and excited, and about to cry all at once, and she never gave anyone a chance to say a word, though she had to pause just a second every now and then for breath.

"This is a *Charity* 'Sociation, ain't it? Good, pious women, meetin' to sew, and get up bazars, and dinners, and things to raise money for them that 's pore and needy — ain't they? You give mighty generous and free to them that 's hungry in body. What have you give to them that 's lonely in spirit? What have you give to a pore, motherless girl right in yore midst, that had n't no brothers and sisters nor kinfolks to be company for her? What good 's a *Charity* 'Sociation in this town if just one pore, lonesome child grieves herself nigh to death for want of friends? How much *charity* have you give to a certain fine, noble, young man that done his best to cheer up that girl, and got

'em off safe to Bell's Junction a half hour ago? And if he don't make her happy, she ain't got nothing to do but come straight back to me!"

Everybody looked perfectly dazed, and I was so excited my skin got to creeping and felt exactly like I was about to break out with something. Mrs. McDade breathed hard once or twice and then went on.

"That girl was a-sufferin' for want of sympathy and friends just the same as ever Miss Williams and Mrs. Brascomb was drowndin' when they had fell in the pond. Philip St. John jumps in and pulls 'em out, and everybody praises him and wants to shake his hand! In just the same kind spirit he tries to be friendly to lonesome little Pauline Finley when everybody else is neglectin' her, and because he 's seen talkin' to her a few times, then when she 's gone, and nobody don't know where she is, all the gossipin' tongues in Pine Grove must fall to and say he 's put notions in her head and encouraged her to go traipsin' off to Chicago and act on the stage! When she ain't had a idea of such a thing for years, and ain't had a thought of runnin' away nowhere! And I never would of knowed you was sayin' that about that angel of a young man, if this here blessed child had n't of opened my eyes."

She waved her hand at me, and they all stared until I never was so embarrassed in my life. Nobody said a word. They sat like they had been struck dumb and were glued to their chairs.

"And after Bea told me what they was sayin'," she went on, "I never lost a minute, and I 've been on the

dead go ever since, tryin' to find Philip, and him off tendin' to all them sick Flannigans, and not bein' able to get him till after supper! And havin' to go home yesterday and tell Pauline that she must go right out and show these Pine Grovians that she was n't traipsin' 'round no city with actor people, because that was what they was sayin' — that she was on the stage in Chicago. For they ain't nothin' too bad for gossips to say when they once get started. And I told her how they was sayin' that Philip St. John had egged her on to it — and you can take my word, Pauline was the most surprised girl you ever saw in your life! And she said she was so sorry; she felt all along it was n't just right not to let people know where she was at, even if they did n't care anything about her.

"And me doin' the best I could for her after that night I knocked her down in the rain and pretty near drove over her and kilt her! And I would n't have saw her at all if I had n't stopped at Wilburs' for that honey I wanted, and waited a bit for the rain to slack; and when I left there was that child, walkin' in the rain, havin' her cry out, and fightin' it out by herself, because her sweetheart was goin' to marry somebody else, and her heart was plum broke! Most girls, when they have their little love troubles, have home folks to make it easier for 'em, and other things to interest 'em. But she never had nothin', not even a place where she could cry in peace; for people that never cared for her was likely to come to her shop any time, and she did n't want 'em to see her cryin'. So she went out in the rain, and I

near run over her before I saw her. If I had n't of jerked old Tom to one side just when I did, she might now be layin' up crippled, or maybe dead and in her grave, instead of bein' on her way to Colorado!"

By this time I could see they were all so dazed their heads were swimming. Aunt Em finally got in a word and asked if Pauline had been found.

"She ain't never been lost, yet!" snapped Mrs. McDade. "If you want to know where she 's at now, she 's in a carriage on her way to Bell's Junction with her husband, headed out West, and her pa-in-law payin' all expenses! And as pretty a weddin' as anybody 'd wanter see, if it *was* at my house, and jumped up so sudden we never had time to make a weddin' cake!"

She caught her breath and then rushed on.

"When I finally got word to Philip St. John that I wanted to see him, he come right out to my house last night, and they ain't none of you surpriseder than he was, for he never knowed no more about Pauline than you did! He set with us a long time, and cheered us up quite a bit, though he did say it was a mistake for Pauline not to tell people where she was at, because everybody was unhappy and worried about her, and that Pine Grove folks thought more of her than she imagined they did; and I told him not to blame Pauline, for it was all my fault. And he advised Pauline to come right back to her work and let people know she was safe; and we was just fixin' to drive in next day, when here comes a carriage with Old Man Bennet, and Selmer, and Mr. Peters, and Dr. Phil — back again! And they had a license and railroad tickets for the bridal tower!"

Mrs. McDade never stopped a minute. She caught her breath again, and then she went right on, saying, when she heard that Old Man Bennet had decided to let Selmer and Pauline marry with his consent and blessing, and plenty to live on, and a fine trip out West to see how they 'd like to live there, you could have knocked her down with a feather! She said at first she was against it, and she was just about to take Pauline aside and tell her that after the wishy-washy, two-faced way Selmer had acted, she ought to give him the grand bounce right there and send him about his business. But she said she never had the heart to do it.

" When them two young things looked at each other," she said, " like they had forgot the rest of us was livin', and I saw how pale and spindlin' Selmer was, when he useter be so slick and red-cheeked, and how the tears come in their eyes, and Selmer went over to Pauline with his arms out, and she ran straight into 'em, and they put their heads against each other and cried — well, sir, I knowed that in a case like that it was n't no use to remind Pauline of an old verse I 've heard:

> ' Let him alone; his chin runs in,
> And what he 's done he 'll do agin! '

I knowed they was n't nothin' to do but let it go on. And you might n't believe it of Mr. Bennet, but when them two children put their arms 'round each other and cried, that old skin-flint had tears in his own wicked old eyes! I *saw* 'em.

" I guess Selmer 's all in this world he cares for.

Well, they was married, and Becky and Jinny served 'em coffee and cake, and everything went off well, and the whole bunch drove off to the Junction to catch the up-train at four-thirty — Old Man Bennet and Dr. Phil and Mr. Peters going along to see 'em off and throw rice after 'em. And I 've just hurried over here to give out the word that they need n't be no more stories told about Pauline actin' on the stage!"

She was obliged to stop a minute then, for she was clear out of breath, and you ought to have heard the questions pour in! Where did all this happen? And when? Where did Pauline go after Mrs. McDade nearly ran over her? Where had she been all these weeks?

"At my house," Mrs. McDade answered to the last question. She was quieter now that she had got some of it off her mind, and she looked tired. Then she took up her story again.

"When I got out of the surrey to see what it was old Tom had run against, I nearly keeled over when I found Pauline layin' there unconscious, with a bleedin' cut on her head. She must of been crossin' the road, and it was rainin', and nearly dark, and we did n't see each other. Lord knows how I done it, but I histed her into the surrey and drove for all I was worth to my house."

Miss Williams then broke in, saying, "Why on earth did n't you take her to the nearest place?"

But she and some of the rest of them began to look sheepish and ashamed when Mrs. McDade said, "Well,

to tell the plain truth, they ain't many people about here been neighborly enough to neither me nor Pauline for me to feel like takin' the liberty of carryin' her in just anywhere. Besides that, I was the one what knocked her over, and I felt like it was to my house she ought to be took. When she come to, soon after I got home, I saw she was n't hurt bad and I need n't send for a doctor. Her head had hit a rock, and it stunned her, but the cut was n't deep — her thick hair kept it from bein' worse — so I just took care of her myself and put her to bed, and Becky made toast and tea for her, and I set by her till she dropped off to sleep. Next mornin' she was better, but I saw she was n't eatin' no breakfast, and it was plain as day she was grievin' about somethin'; so when we was alone I put my arms around her just like I 've always wanted to put 'em around a child of my own, and told her to tell me all about it. At first she only cried, but after a while it all come out about how she loved Selmer, and he loved her too, but his father wanted him to marry Katherine, and of course she would n't try to hold Selmer if he was willin' to give her up.

"I told her she oughter gone and told Katherine all about it, but she 's got her pride, and she said no, she could n't do that, and besides maybe Katherine loved Selmer, too, and Katherine had always been sweet and kind to her.

"So the child — she ain't but nineteen — was tryin' to fight it down and conquer her love for Selmer. She said she could of stood it better, only she was so lonely,

and people seemed to look down on her because she was poor and had to work; and I could see the little thing was grievin' most as much about not havin' more friends as she was about Selmer.

"It made me plumb fightin' mad with this whole town! I told Pauline I was lonely too, and that I was goin' to keep her with me for a spell, and for her to just stop thinkin' about Selmer and the other people — they was n't worth it.

"I could see she was glad for somebody to be friendly and to want to have her with 'em, but she said she 'd hafter go back and get some clothes. And I said no, just to stay with me, and not say a word to nobody, and let Pine Grove think what it pleased; and I 'd send a order to Bradford for a lot of stuff, and we 'd make her up some pretty clothes. Maybe I was wrong, but I was thinkin' it would give her somethin' to do and help to get her mind off Selmer. Real pretty dresses and things sometimes goes a long way in interestin' young girls. Well, sir, both of us thought that Pine Grove was so indifferent to Pauline it would n't think nothin' but that she had gone somewhere for a visit; we never thought about nobody worryin' about it. So I give orders to Becky and Jinny not to say a word about Pauline bein' with us; and if I do say it, they ain't no other niggers in this place that can be trusted about talkin' like Becky and Jinny can."

That made me kind of jealous, and I wished that Aunt Em would speak out and say that Aunt Sally could be trusted as well as any other nigger; but I knew

she could n't say it and tell the truth, because Aunt Sally never was known to keep anything. Father once said there were two things you could count on Aunt Sally for, just as you could count on the sun to rise and set. One was to get religion and shout every time there was a revival at any colored church, and the other was to tell everything she knew.

Mrs. McDade had stopped again to get her breath, and Miss Williams grabbed her chance and asked her if she meant to say that Pauline had been at her house all this time when everybody was looking high and low for her.

"Did n't you *know* she was being searched for? And all of us feeling anxious and alarmed?" Miss Williams spoke in her regular school-teacher voice, just exactly like she says, "Beatrice Crawford, did n't you know that was against the rule? You may report 'disorderly conduct' to-morrow at roll-call." But it did n't make a dent in Mrs. McDade.

"Yes, I knowed it good and well," she answered, "and I never cared a picayune neither. Them that was so anxious and alarmed after she had went away oughter thought a little more about her when they had the chanst. I ain't no doubt but everybody felt very kind and friendly when they thought maybe Pauline had been murdered; and if she had a-been kilt dead when my horse knocked her down, my land! how they would of grieved and flocked 'round puttin' flowers on her coffin! They could n't ask her to their parties, but Lord! how they would of turned out and cried at her funeral!

All I got to say is, them hands a-handin' out funeral wreaths oughter been reached out sooner."

Mrs. McDade may not use very good grammar, but you can always tell just what she means. She said so many things that afternoon that I may not have it all down in just the order she spoke, and I may have left out some of it; but I think I have it pretty straight, for I was listening hard, and there are very few things in my life that I remember better than I remember that afternoon.

"Yes, I knowed they was looking for Pauline, but I never told her nothin' about it; and I felt that if anybody's consciences was a-hurtin' 'em, it served 'em right. But I never heard a word about that stage gossip 'till Bea told me; then I saw at once where I had been wrong. Well, to wind it all up, they 're married, and them clothes we had made for Pauline come in very handy for a weddin' outfit, and that 's about all there is of it."

I wonder what they would have thought if I had told them how Billy had helped things along!

Mrs. McDade looked pale and tired, and her voice did n't sound so blustery. She said if things had n't turned out like they did, she had meant to tell Katherine about Selmer, because she liked Katherine and was n't going to see her throw herself away on a man in love with another girl; and her secret hope had been that both the girls would turn Selmer down. Then Aunt Em interrupted for the first time and told Mrs. McDade that what she had done was wonderfully good and kind,

but she asked if it was n't doubtful whether Selmer would be good to Pauline, he was so weak and mercenary.

Mrs. McDade was gasping for breath, but she answered at once, " Pauline ain't helpless. She knows I 'm back of her and that she can come straight to me if ever she wants to. They 're goin' to try livin' in the West for a while, and maybe things will turn out well, for Selmer 's fond of her in his own selfish way, and Pauline loves the very ground he walks on. She 's a dear, good girl. I 'm goin' to miss her, for I got to care a lot — about her — "

And then Mrs. McDade nearly scared us all to death by sliding out of her chair in a dead faint!

CHAPTER XX

Mrs. McDade Begins to be Appreciated

Although Mrs. McDade had lost twenty-one pounds since she had been following Dr. Phil's advice, there was still so much of her that when she fainted, all of them together could n't get her on the sofa. They had to leave her on the floor and put cushions under her head, and Aunt Em ran for ice-water and smelling-salts, and Miss Harriet loosened her clothes and said, "Poor woman! It 's been too much for her." They sponged her face and held smelling-salts to her nose, and in a minute or two she began to come to herself. It frightened me dreadfully. Aunt Em made her drink a little wine, and then she tried to get up; but she was dizzy, and they all helped her to the lounge, and everybody tried to do things for her at once. Aunt Em got a fresh pillow, and Mrs. Peters fanned her, and Miss Williams loosened her hair, and Miss Harriet sat by her and sponged her forehead with cologne water and talked to her like she would have talked to a sick little child.

"You poor dear. You 've quite overdone yourself. There now; you 'll be feeling all right directly. Don't you worry. What is it you want? Becky? Somebody call Becky, please. She 's in the kitchen with Aunt Sally. You 've shown more sense than all of us put together.

And with all the strain you 've been under — no wonder you should break down a little. You 're a good, noble woman, Mrs. McDade, and you 've taught us all a lesson we 'll never forget."

" And that 's the truth too!" said Mrs. Peters, with her eyes all wet. When I think of my little Marjorie, who might have lived to be an orphan and alone — I — " And then she broke down and cried, and the tears came in everybody's eyes, and I had an awful, swelling-up feeling that makes my throat hurt. The tears were going down Mrs. McDade's cheeks, and it was a good thing Aunt Sally and Becky came in just then and got things switched off to something else. They all made much of Mrs. McDade, each one trying to see who could do the most for her, and you could see she enjoyed it, although she did have tears in her eyes.

" After all, I guess you-all never meant to be unkind to Pauline. I guess you just did n't think," she said.

" But we 'll think now, Mrs. McDade," said Miss Harriet. " You 've taught us."

" Harriet 's right," said Aunt Em. " And as president of this Association, I want you to know, Mrs. McDade, that we honor you for what you have done; and we want you to join us, and work with us, and let your kind, sensible heart guide us in making this organization more worthy of its name." Aunt Em was actually flushed in the face, and all wrought up, as she went on, " We want you to be a light to us to — "

Mrs. McDade sat straight up and broke in, saying, " Me! Good gracious! I ain't got the education to be

a light to nobody; but I 'm a-goin' to tell you a secret. They ain't *nothin'* hardly I 've ever wanted like I 've wanted to be in this 'Sociation. I love helpin' the pore and doin' things for 'em, and I made sure I 'd be ast to join when the 'Sociation was started, and it 's near broke my heart because I war n't. I don't mind tellin' it now, since I 've been ast to join; but honest to goodness, it was feelin' so out of everything, and not bein' let in to things I would of loved to do, that made me lay around at home and get so lazy, and eat so much, and take on so much weight, and have everybody thinkin' I was just a selfish old glutton. That 's the truth. I never had nothin' else to do." Aunt Sally and Becky had gone before she said all this.

For a minute no one said a word, and I was shocked when I saw Aunt Em's eyes full of tears, for the first time in my life. She glared around at everybody and said, " We 've all been perfect idiots! " and then snapped her mouth shut in the fiercest kind of way. Then she sat down by Mrs. McDade and took one of her big fat hands and started to say something, and every time she 'd try to speak her chin would quiver so that she 'd snap her mouth shut fiercer than ever.

Then something strange happened to me — a funny kind of feeling that made my throat swell and my heart go fast as lightning. All at once I felt that there was n't anybody on earth any better and kinder than Aunt Em, and I said to myself then and there that if Billy ever called her a cat again, I 'd slap him; and I went and stood just as close by her as I could get and pressed my

cheek against her arm. I never had done such a thing in all my life before — that is, not with Aunt Em — and she patted my arm, and we 've been better friends ever since.

Just then there came another clatter of wheels, and in a minute here came Dr. Phil and father and Doctor. Father and Doctor went straight up to Mrs. McDade, and shook her hand so long, and said so many nice things to her about feeling it an honor to know her, that she got as pink in the face as Miss Harriet does sometimes, and she was so pleased and happy that she could n't say a word. Dr. Phil had told Doctor all about it before he went over to Mrs. McDade's with the wedding crowd; yet I was the only one who knew that he had n't told quite all when Doctor said, " What beats me is how Phil ever got Selmer's father to come around."

And father agreed and said he could n't understand that part of it himself. Dr. Phil got red in the face and said he did n't have anything to do with it, that Old Man Bennet changed his mind of his own accord. This was partly the truth, for I was the only one who knew what Billy had done. But I knew Dr. Phil had n't given Old Man Bennet away. Of course he would tell father all about it when he had a chance, for nothing else would be fair, and he had only promised Mr. Bennet to leave the matter between him and father. Everybody was feeling happier and better, and asking Mrs. McDade and Doctor and father one question after another, when Becky and Aunt Sally came in with trays full of tea and beaten biscuits and the little cakes Aunt Em had

brought from Bradford. Aunt Sally did the honors, saying as she passed the napkins around,

"Bein' as Miss Em 's so tuk up wid de im-porturence of dis S'ciety, dat she done clear fergot de 'freshments, me an' Becky done make free to pass 'em 'round, suitin' to de 'casion." And everybody just pitched in and had the best kind of time. I drank two cups of tea before Aunt Em saw me, and Mrs. McDade forgot all about being sick and drank three cups of tea and ate seven little cakes!

CHAPTER XXI

It Never Did Run Smooth

The next day Billy and I watched father's face every time he came in, to see if he showed any signs of knowing about Old Man Bennet, and we could see he did n't know a thing. He said something again to Aunt Em about its being a mystery to him what had got Old Man Bennet to change his mind, for everybody knew how set he was on a marriage between Selmer and Katherine.

Aunt Em said what interested her most was how Katherine was taking it, for of course everybody knew by this time all about how Pauline had been at Mrs. McDade's and how she and Selmer had married and gone West. That set me to thinking about Katherine and her part in it all, and right after dinner I went over to the Pasture, clear across to Uncle George's barn gate, and whistled our signal until the twins heard me and came out. They said they were hanging round the barn anyway, waiting for a chance to slip through the bars into the Pasture when Abe was n't looking. We went down to the bank under the chestnuts, where we could hang our feet in the Branch and talk, for Mary and Carey were full of things to tell.

Something had happened at their house, too, the day before. About two o'clock Dr. Phil drove up to the gate. Katherine was on the porch in the hammock, Uncle George was out, and Aunt Lou was upstairs taking her nap. Mary was out in Mandy's house, but Carey happened to be near a window and saw Dr. Phil drive up and hitch his horse at the gate. So she ran out, and then came around the house and hid in a Cape jasmine bush close up to the end of the porch where Katherine was lying. Carey said Katherine had plenty of time to go in before Dr. Phil got to the porch, if she had wanted to, but she did n't do it. She only sat up in the hammock and looked at him coldly, as much as to say, "I wonder what *you* want."

"I know it 's awfully contempturous to eavesdrop," Carey said; "but Katherine never will tell us a thing, and I was just crazy to see if she would make up with Dr. Phil. When she stared at him that way, I could have slapped her — if she had n't looked so little and pale."

"What did he say?" I asked.

Carey stood up straight and put her hand to her head like she was taking off a hat.

"He said 'Good afternoon, Miss Crawford. I hope you will believe that it disgraces me very much to give you this. I only came because there was no one else, and Selmer thought he could write more easily than he could talk with you — about this matter.' And he handed her a note and turned away while she read it."

"How could he say it disgraced him just to give her

a note? I don't believe it. Maybe he said 'distressed,'" I told Carey.

"Well, anyhow, he said something like that. Don't stop me about little things like words, Bea," she said, getting impatient. So I told her to go on, and she did. When he gave Katherine the note she looked very much surprised at first, and she read it through; and as she read, Carey said her face flushed and she had a kind of glad, relieved look, and then she said in a soft little voice, "Why did you bring it?"

And he answered, "Because it was your justice to know. In simple fractions, you should be the one to break the engagement." Carey said this in a cold, stiff way which she thought was like Dr. Phil acted.

Before I could help it I blurted out, "You *know* he never said 'simple fractions'!"

And Carey said, "Well, he said simple *something;* and if you don't stop interloping me, Bea, I won't tell another thing!"

I promised to stop, and she went on,

"Then Dr. Phil handed her a pencil and a note-book and said, 'Write just a few lines, please — if you wish to do it. I have only a few minutes and must get back.' Then she took the little book and wrote something, and he took it and was about to leave, when she said in a shaky kind of voice, 'I was so wrong! I am very sorry, Philip. Please forgive me.' But he bowed very politely and said, 'Indeed there's nothing to forgive, Miss Crawford. You thought only what others thought. Good-by.' And he was gone in a hurry."

Now *was n't* that a nice way to do! Calling her "Miss Crawford" and marching off when she asked him to forgive her! If that 's the way people who are in love treat each other, I am surprised that anybody ever gets married in this world. Then Carey said, after he left Katherine went up to her mother's room, and after a little while Aunt Lou came flying down and sent Abe in a hurry after Uncle George, and then told her to go and play with Mary in the yard until she called them in.

Uncle George was in his river-bottom field, so it was some time before he could get to the house. He went straight upstairs to Aunt Lou and Katherine, and Carey said nobody but the judgment seat knows what went on up there. They were all quiet at supper, even Aunt Lou, and right after supper Uncle George went out again. Mary said Mandy told her she heard him tell Aunt Lou he was going to see Old Man Bennet.

"Was Katherine sick this morning?" I asked; and Mary said no, she was n't. She ate her breakfast and looked better than she had in weeks. But Uncle George was glum as he could be and snapped everybody up.

"And at the breakfast table," Carey added, "when mother said Dr. Phil had taken a great deal on himself, and was very official to come and bring any such news to Katherine, father said, 'No, he was n't anything of the kind. He did exactly right!' Bea, what on earth do you reckon was in that note? And was n't it funny for Selmer to marry Pauline, when he 's been just crazy about Katherine so long?"

I was n't listening much to her questions. I was thinking that I was glad Uncle George said what he did about Dr. Phil, and I nearly forgave him for threatening to switch me. Of course you could n't expect Aunt Lou to see it right. Father says she is one of the kind that looks at everything through diminishing glasses and only sees things in one tiny spot.

When I started home from the Pasture, I met Billy in the barnyard. He said he saw Dr. Phil just a minute at the drug-store, and he wanted us to meet him at the rock-pile the next morning at ten o'clock, and we must keep our secret tight until we saw him. We knew from that he had n't told father yet, and we wondered and wondered why he was holding back, because of course father ought to know.

We were ahead of time at the rocks the next day, but Dr. Phil was there. He said he had been looking around, because he did n't know a more interesting place anywhere than this bit of land. We went to the top of the rocks, where it was cooler, and sat in the splash of black shade made by the cedar clump.

"Now, Billy and Bea," he began, "we three know certain things, and we all know that your father ought to be told those things. I've asked you to keep this quiet for a while, and you've kept the secret nobly. Now I want to ask you a question. You don't hit a man when he's down, do you?"

Billy shook his head for both of us, and I waited for what would come next. Dr. Phil continued,

"Well, it's like this. Mr. Bennet is badly shaken up

by this business of being caught like he was in your father's house. He was too sick to leave his bed yesterday, and he appealed to me to keep his part of this matter from your father for just a day or two, until he can pull himself together again. Then he has promised on his honor to go himself to Colonel Crawford and tell him all the facts. Frankly, I am satisfied that he is playing for time and wants to think up a plausible story to account for his actions, but just the same he is really sick and — we 'll give him first inning, won't we, Billy? Because he has really acted very well towards Selmer and Pauline."

"Sure," Billy agreed at once. "And then after he tells father his side, we 'll tell him ours, won't we?"

"Exactly. Your father must know all we can tell him about this matter," answered Dr. Phil.

"S'pose he slips away?" I asked.

But Dr. Phil said Mr. Bennet would n't do that, because he was keeping too close tabs on him; and if he should get sick enough not to be able to talk to father for some time, why of course *he* would just tell it himself — he was only giving Mr. Bennet a chance to tell first. But of course, he said, father must be told soon, because all this mystery might have a meaning of serious importance.

"And now that we are agreed to keep this secret a little longer," he said, "suppose we decide upon the day we are going fishing." He had promised weeks ago to take us fishing, and I thought he had forgotten all about it. But Dr. Phil was n't one of the sort to promise

things and then forget. He kept his word to children just the same as if they were grown up, and since he had come to Pine Grove I had added a new postscript to my prayers. Every night when I have finished my ordinary prayer of "Our Father, who art in heaven" and "God bless father, and Aunt Em, and Billy, and everybody, and make me a good girl," I add this: "God make Billy grow up to be like Dr. Phil."

Old Man Bennet did n't get better; in another day he was in a raging fever and talking out of his head. Mrs. Jones, living just around the corner, helped to nurse him, and she told Aunt Em he just babbled all the time and there was no sense in anything he said. Sometimes he 'd be talking about grandfather Crawford, and then it would be Doctor, and once he kept saying Miss Harriet ought to have married Selmer and then things would have been different. Mrs. Jones said, bad as she felt for Mr. Bennet, it was all she could do to keep from laughing when he said that; and again he said you 'd find it by the rocks in the Pasture. She said you could n't put anything together, and it was just a jumble of broken-off sentences and names; and she always had heard that when people were delirious with brain fever, they told secrets and gave all kinds of things away, but she 'd dare anybody to make head or tail out of the things Old Man Bennet said. When he had been sick three or four days Dr. Phil came to see father one afternoon, and they walked out in the orchard. When they came back I knew from father's face that Dr. Phil had told him.

Billy and I were sitting on the back steps, and when they came up father put a hand on Billy's shoulder, and one on mine and said, "I've got two straight, manly little chaps, haven't I, Philip?" I never felt so proud in my life; and Billy looked as if he'd just saved a dozen lives, but he wasn't going to brag about it. It made me feel lots better to have father know, because he would of course tell Aunt Em, and now there wouldn't be so many secrets to keep, and we could talk and ask questions and wonder about things. Billy and I were surprised to find out that Dr. Phil didn't have the smallest idea what Old Man Bennet had been looking for. He had only guessed at things.

"But he had him going all right," Billy said. "That night he had Old Man Bennet thinking he was right on to him and knew a whole lot."

And the strangest part was that father couldn't imagine what it all meant any more than Dr. Phil could. Neither he nor Aunt Em knew the smallest reason why anybody should be hunting for anything on our place.

"If there's a secret in the Crawford family history in the past three generations, I've never heard of it," said Aunt Em; and father said he was blessed if he had either. And even if there was a secret, no one could imagine how Old Man Bennet could be interested in it.

"There's just one line of deduction that I can see yet," said Dr. Phil; and when father asked him what that line might be, he replied, "It's all so hazy and intangible, Colonel, that I'd rather not say, unless something develops to make things clearer. You see I may

be all wrong. You know I 'm an inquisitive kind of fellow, and I 've been feeling around ever since I heard about all that ghost business, talking to Uncle John and some other old-timers about here, and since this last affair — well, can't you see a little glimmer of light?"

"Frankly, I can't," said father. "You 've got me guessing. What do you suspect?"

Dr. Phil laughed and said it was all too uncertain yet for him to feel as if he ought to express himself. "We can only wait until Bennet recovers, Colonel, and then force him to explain."

That night Billy said to me, "Bea, I bet you my knife against the pigeon there ain't a busier town on all the map than Pine Grove. All the women and girls are visiting like fury to tell about the wedding, and Aunt Sally and Mandy and Delia just keep the road hot going back and forth, and you and me and the twins have n't done a thing but guess at things for a month. Gee! I 'll be glad to go fishing!"

"I will too," I said. "But Pine Grove 's not on the map, and I won't bet."

CHAPTER XXII

Another Surprising Secret

Father and Aunt Em had started a great search. They were trying to find out what Mr. Bennet had been looking for, and they began with the attic and ended with the loft in the barn. Father said he was satisfied it must be a paper of some kind, or else Mr. Bennet was possessed of some demented idea. Dr. Phil and Doctor both thought Mr. Bennet was perfectly sane, and that he knew something he should have told father long ago. But none of them could imagine what the secret could be, and not a scrap of paper or anything else could be found that father and Aunt Em did n't already know all about.

Father asked Aunt Em if she could remember the first time Mr. Bennet showed an interest in our old furniture, and she said yes, it was about a month after grandfather died. He came and asked if father and mother wanted to dispose of any of the old furniture that was in grandfather's room; he wanted to furnish a room in old mahogany, he said. But father did n't want to sell any of it. He had a trunk and some chairs and the letter-case stored away in the barn loft because they were old and shabby, but he said he meant to have them reno-

vated some day, and he would n't part with a stick of anything that had been in the family a long time.

After that Mr. Bennet had been in the habit of coming now and then, and frequently he would get around to the subject of old furniture and offer to pay a good price for grandfather's old set complete, if father should ever take a notion to sell. "I remember now," Aunt Em said, "he 'd come most often on rainy days, and late in the afternoons, several times when you were away, Will."

"He was fishing for an invitation to spend the night," said Dr. Phil. "He wanted a chance to search that room unmolested. He was frightened away before he had made a thorough search on the night you and Aunt Sally discovered him. He escaped through the window and around the porch by the back stairway. He tried searching the old things in the barn several times. Evidently there 's something in connection with that old furniture, for it is perfectly plain he was searching for something which he knew Mr. Crawford kept in his own room."

Aunt Em said she supposed so, but what there could be about grandfather's matters that concerned Mr. Bennet was beyond her.

After a while Old Man Bennet got better, but he was still very feeble; and when father or Dr. Phil tried to talk to him about that night, he would look unknowing and begin to talk in a rambling kind of way. Dr. Phil told father he believed it was all pretense, but he could n't be sure, and they could n't do anything but

wait until he was stronger. Aunt Sally caught on that something was in the air, and she was simply dying to know all about it, but Billy and I knew better than to even hint at anything to her.

And now that Selmer and Pauline were married and gone, I could n't see anything in the way of Katherine and Dr. Phil making up their love affair. But they were not getting on a single inch; on the other hand they seemed to be farther apart.

One day when we were wading in the Branch, I asked the twins if he had n't been to see Katherine yet, and Carey said no, not a single time, and Katherine was so thin her collar-bones were beginning to show, and she stayed by herself most of the time and pretended to read. At first, just after Selmer married, she had looked brighter, but after a few days she began to droop again, and now she was looking perfectly awful.

"And she won't own there 's anything the matter," said Mary. "And she will hardly eat a thing; and if anybody asks her if she 's not feeling well, she gets cross as anything and says please let her alone, for there 's nothing on earth the matter with her!"

Carey took it up just as if she and Mary were one person, and if you were n't looking you 'd have thought so yourself, for their voices are exactly alike: "And you know well enough it does n't favor Katherine to be cross, when she 's always been so jolly and the life of everything at home! And father and mother are getting uneasy and are talking about sending her to Sulphur Springs to stay a month, only she says she won't go. I

tell you what, Bea, it 's awful trying on a family to have a benighted love affair in it."

I said it was time somebody was doing something about it. And Billy answered, " Nothing of the kind. You kids better keep out of it. If Dr. Phil and Katherine can't go on by themselves *now* and get married, it 's nobody else's business. They 're old enough." And he skeeted up water through his toes in the most heartless way and said he did n't see why people were always wanting to get married anyway.

That 's all Billy knows. Boys his age are awfully ignorant. *Everybody* knows that when people grow up they ought to get married. I guess Billy thought he had done his part about helping Dr. Phil, and all the thanks he got was that Dr. Phil would n't even go near Kathie. It 's often that way; grown people don't appreciate what you do for them at all.

I knew that Katherine and Dr. Phil both went to see Miss Harriet at times, though they never went together any more; so I went to see her myself one day. Somehow I felt as if she could help, if she would just talk to Dr. Phil and tell him what he ought to do, like she does to me sometimes.

I found her on her front porch, making ribbon roses, and I sat down and did n't stop to say any polite things about what a nice day it was, but just told her all I knew about Katherine and Dr. Phil and asked her if she could n't think of something to do about it.

I never will forget what she said to me. " Bea, my child," she said in a very sweet, grave way, " I 'm afraid

we must leave this for Katherine and Philip to work out for themselves. We can only hope it will come right."

"But somebody ought to talk to him, because he's to blame," I said. "Katherine told him that she was sorry."

"We can't say who's to blame, dear," she answered. "And now, Bea, I'm going to tell you something I want you to remember. Never judge anyone — that is, believe they have done wrong — until you know things from all sides. If someone you love has done something you can't understand, don't jump at conclusions and think all sorts of wrong things about your friend. If you do, you are not a friend yourself. You are only a sort of poor *imitation* of a friend, and imitations don't count for anything. Always give people the benefit of the doubt, and you'll often see that things turn out to be just the opposite of what they seemed. And remember this too, dear — if you misjudge your friend, you destroy that friend's confidence in *you* as a friend. And saying you are sorry, and regretting it bitterly, and asking forgiveness won't always make things right again."

She was looking far off with a strange expression, almost as if she had forgotten I was there. I sighed as loud as I could, to make her remember, and in a second she was looking at me again and saying, "You are just a little girl, Bea, but you are an understanding little girl, and I think you will know what I mean when I say, if you wish to avoid much unhappiness in your life,

believe in those you love through thick and thin. Stick up to them through everything."

"I do know what that means, Miss Harriet, and I mean always to do it," I said. Miss Harriet said that was right, and I must try to remember it after I grew to be a big girl.

Uncle George always has his way, so it was no surprise to anyone when, a week later, Aunt Lou and Katherine and the twins were packed off to Sulphur Springs. I knew all about the place because I went there once with father when his digestion was wrong. There was a long, three-storied house with ells at each end and a porch all around, which was called The Inn. It sat on a hill thick with trees, and a twisting board-walk led down the hill to where there was a group of springs which had the most awfully bad water I ever tasted. Some of them were even worse than others, and the worse the water tasted, the more good it did you. Then there was a kind of boxed-in pool that held plain Branch water, which was pumped up to the hotel for bathing.

I drank that Branch water the whole time we were there and never heard until afterwards that it was n't meant to drink! But it never did me any harm, and it certainly tasted better than the other. There were lots of swings, and a tennis court, and a bowling alley, and billiard rooms; and every night they danced in the dining-room and played cards on the porch. Every morning before they went in to breakfast the people would rush out to the porch and drink glass after glass

of that bad-smelling water. It looked piggish to me. But everybody that was anybody did it — except me. It was the gayest kind of place, and the more I told the twins about it, the more excited they were about going.

When they were finally gone, I thought I was going to be so lonesome I 'd pretty nearly die, but I never did have time to be. It was September, and the Pasture looked as if it was just trying itself to see how many colors it could show all at once. There was a kind of purple flower growing close to the roots of the brier bushes, and everywhere goldenrod was flaming like a fire. Some of the trees, too, were showing scarlet and yellow leaves, and the sky was the bluest kind of blue, splashed over with silky little white clouds; some of them looked like whole rolls and piles of chiffon. Even the Branch had a new kind of beauty. The water was so low that it ran in little thin ripples down the very center of the bed, and so clear that you could see every tiny minnow and every pearly pebble on the bottom; and on each side the gravel bottom, that was now out of water, looked exactly like little narrow strips of beach. It was delightful to lie right down on that white, dampish, sweet-smelling sand, and listen to the soft little purring noise the water made, and look up into the chestnuts and see the birds dart here and there and sometimes a squirrel, tearing up to the very highest limb.

You could think stories there until your head would swim. After the twins left I started a new one, about a cruel old miser, who had a beautiful daughter. There was a cave in that story and buried treasure, and it all

happened on a lonely beach by the sea. So there could n't possibly have been a better place to think it out than that little strip of sand by the Branch. One day I was lying there thinking of a terribly exciting part, where the old miser had his daughter locked in a dungeon, and her lover was trying to get her out, when right behind me somebody said,

" Bea, I 've found out a brand new secret! Something you 'd never have dreamed of till your teeth dropped out! "

I jumped like I was shot — my mind had been so far away — and there sat Billy, about three feet back of me. For a minute it made me mad, for when you think you are all alone, and somebody speaks to you suddenly, it gives you such a " dislocated " feeling, as Carey said once when she was going into the fig preserves and thought nobody was in the house until Aunt Lou spoke right over her shoulder.

But when I heard Billy's news I forgot all about my own feelings. It was certainly the most amazing thing I ever had dreamed of!

Doctor and Miss Harriet were in love!

I crumpled all up, and nearly sat in the Branch, and said I did n't believe it. But Billy said it was the honest-to-goodness truth, and he would n't have believed it either if he had n't seen it with his own eyes and heard it with his own ears.

Billy uses so much slang that I won't tell it in his words, but it amounted to just this:

To start with, he was coming home from the store by

the Old Meadow Road, and a bit ahead of him was Doctor in his buggy. Doctor had got so well that he often went for short drives by himself, though someone still had to help him about getting in and out of the buggy. Just ahead of Doctor Miss Harriet was walking, and when he came up to her he stopped and she got in the buggy with him. Then Billy paused, like he was through — he got that from Aunt Sally.

"Well, that 's nothing," I said. "Anybody can take anybody up and drive them home when they are going their way. Everybody does it. If *that 's* all you 've got to tell!"

"Who said that was all?" asked Billy, and then he went on and told the rest. All the boys have a great way of stealing rides on the back of buggies and wagons, so Billy ran after Doctor's buggy, thinking he 'd swing on behind; but Doctor was driving too fast, and at first he could n't catch up. After a while, though, Dobbin slowed down to his usual walk, and then Billy soon caught up and swung on to the back of the buggy. Billy said they were talking, and he never paid any attention until he heard Miss Harriet say, "It was no harder for you, John, than it was for me." And Doctor answered, "Yes, it was harder for me, Harriet, because after I saw you were not going to marry Bennet, I realized that I ought to have waited longer, that there might have been an explanation. I never forgot you, Harriet, never for a day."

Billy said he nearly dropped off the buggy, and before he could make up his mind what to do, he heard Miss

Harriet say, "Don't blame yourself, John. We were both foolish. Young people can't realize things." And he said, "But it is n't too late yet. We 'll start anew — after a while."

"He may not have been making love," I broke in then. "He might have been talking about something else."

"No he was n't either talking about something else," said Billy, "because I could tell from the way his voice sounded he was making up to her all right, all right. But I would n't stay after I saw what was up; I dropped off and walked on behind them. They went just as slow as Dobbin would walk, and when they got to Miss Harriet's gate, he held her hand quite a while when she got out and was saying good-by."

I told Billy he ought to be ashamed to listen and to look, and then I remembered how I had listened in the tree, and how I had to hide behind a bush to keep Dr. Phil and Katherine from knowing I had seen them kissing, and I decided that maybe it was n't so much Billy's fault after all. Grown people are always saying and doing things, as if they think everybody around is blind; and children have either got to dodge behind something and stop their ears or else they can't help seeing and hearing things. Of course I 'm not blaming Doctor for making love in his own private buggy, for he did n't think of such a thing as a little boy swinging on behind, but I 'm just saying that grown people *do* often act as if they did n't know children could see and hear.

"I wonder if he meant Old Man Bennet?" I asked, after a little pause.

"Well, you don't suppose he meant Selmer, do you?" Billy answered. "'Course he meant Old Man Bennet; and I guess both of 'em useter be in love with Miss Harriet when they were all young, and Doctor thought she was going to marry Mr. Bennet, so he went ahead and married Mrs. Willingham, and both of 'em have been sorry ever since. And that's why Miss Harriet never married, I guess."

All that was exactly what I was thinking, but it surprised me for Billy to have seen through it, for usually he isn't very bright about love matters. Then I said, "The question is now whether we ought to tell anybody — father or Dr. Phil or — "

"Nope! Don't you dare to tell!" Billy fairly yelled at me. Then he added in his scornful way, "That's just *girls* all over! Just tell 'em anything, and the first thing they think about is who they can tell it to! If you ever tell anybody I hung on behind that buggy and heard Doctor and Miss Harriet making love, I'll — I'll — well you just tell, if you dare!"

"You needn't get so uppity about it," I said. "I know a good many secrets I've never told, and I have a new one I've never told even you, and now I *never* mean to tell you!"

But Billy and I never stayed mad long, and we were friends again by the time we left the Pasture.

CHAPTER XXIII

Bea Gives a Secret Away and Mrs. McDade Adds to Her Family

One morning father brought me a letter from the twins. They always wrote their letters together, and each one did a certain part. Carey did the thinking and Mary did the writing, because Mary writes a beautiful hand, but she can't think very fast, and Carey's handwriting is awful, but she can always think of things to say. That 's why they write together, though both of them are terrible spellers.

DEAR BEA [they wrote]

This is the loveliest kind of a place, and we like everything but the water. It smells like when you break a setting-hen's eggs. Kathie is the belle of this place. There are 14 young ladies and 3 young men, and Kathie has all 3 of them. The old ladies sit on the porch and rock and do croshay all day long, and a bowl of toothpicks sits on a stand by the dining-room door. But mother won't let us use them, because she says the best people don't usually do such things. We wear our white dresses all day and put on clean ones for supper, and father is going to die when he sees our londry bill! Everybody takes on over us and thinks it is so cute because we look just alike. It 's awful silly of them, because that 's what twins are for. It rained one day, and we wanted to get bear-footed and go out to

paddle, but mother would n't let us. I guess it 's uncorrect to do that at a resort. Everybody ways themselves all the time, and mother has gained ½ a pound, but Kathie has n't. She still ways just 105.

They eat breakfast so late that Mary and I want to go in the kitchen when we 1st get up and get the cook to bake batter-cakes for us — like Mandy does at home; but mother says that would be the uncorrectest thing we *could* do, and people would think we never had been anywhere before. We have n't. So good-by, and much love to you and Billy.

MARY AND CAREY.

I showed that letter to Dr. Phil, because I wanted him to see that Katherine was n't gaining, and I wanted him to know, too, that she was a belle. I hoped it would scare him if he knew three men were going with her. But he only smiled a little and did n't say much. I could n't get him to talk about Katherine, and after a while I just got desperate and said to him, so that he *had* to answer, "But *why* won't you go with her now and make things up, when you know she 's sorry?"

He had a sort of hurt look in his face when he answered, "She does n't care for me, Bea. When you really care for someone, you do not distrust and misjudge without a hearing. You are not old enough, my dear, to understand all this, so it is best for us not to talk about it."

But I would n't stop. I knew that Katherine was just grieving herself to a shadow, and I felt that I ought to take her part. "Then you never did love her," I said, "because when you really love people, you forgive them."

He looked at me very strangely and said I was a wise little girl, but there still were things I could n't understand, and that he loved her so much that he could n't marry her knowing that she could misjudge him.

"But she does n't *now!*" I said. And he answered that perhaps she did n't, but the point was that she *could* have and that she refused to see him and hear his side.

"When you grow to be a woman, Bea, always hear both sides before you judge anyone," he said. I thought of what Miss Harriet said to me, and when I looked at Dr. Phil and saw the hurt, sad look in his eyes, and the pride in his face, and the firm, hard look about his chin, I felt that there was no more use in hoping. Katherine had simply ruined all her chances with him.

So I sighed from my very heart and said, "Well you are just fixing up for another case of somebody being an old maid and somebody else marrying the wrong person, while they loved each other all the time, like Miss Harriet and Doctor and Old Man Bennet!" And then I could have bitten my tongue for telling. I cross my heart I never meant to give Billy's secret away like that. It just came out before I knew it. Dr. Phil was looking at me with the queerest kind of expression I ever saw, and I knew how mad Billy was going to be, but I had said it, and there was no way to take it back.

I never saw anyone so interested as Dr. Phil was, and he was crazy to know what I meant. I could see it was something perfectly new to him. At first I would n't tell. I told him it was a secret Billy had found out, and he would never speak to me again if I told.

But he said he would make it right with Billy, or else Billy should never know I had told, whichever I liked, but that I ought to tell him; it was right for me to do it, because it threw a light on things that he and father were trying to find out. "It may be one of the missing pieces in a puzzle I am trying to put together, Bea, and I would n't ask you to tell if it was n't right, dear," he said.

Of course after that I had to tell him all about it; but I told him that Billy never *meant* to hear those things, and he said, "I know it, Bea. Billy is a gentleman, and he would n't have listened deliberately to what other people were saying for anything in the world."

I thought about the night Billy and I listened on the stairs, when Uncle George came, and about the time he went back to the window of grandfather Crawford's room, after Dr. Phil had told him to go to bed, and I wondered if, after all, Dr. Phil was not laughing to himself. I glanced at him quick to see if I could catch a smile in his eye, but he was perfectly grave. He looked as if he might be studying an arithmetic problem like those that begin: "If A owns a field 169 rods square and sells a corner 50 × 75 feet," and so forth. Arithmetic is the only thing I really hate about school. It gets so much in your way.

Dr. Phil said he believed I had given him a clew, and I knew he was trying to help father about finding out the mystery of our affairs and Old Man Bennet, so I decided that, if I had helped things along, I did n't care how mad Billy got. But what on earth *could* Miss Harriet and Doctor have to do with Old Man Bennet turning

chairs over on our turkey nest and searching our family Bible! It was enough to drive anybody crazy, as Aunt Em would say.

The afternoon of that same day Aunt Em and Miss Harriet and I drove over to see Mrs. McDade. They carried their sewing bags along in a nice, friendly way, and we carried Mrs. McDade a basket of our early pears. I did n't 'specially want to go, because I was crazy to go with Billy and watch the men blast big rocks and stumps out of one of Uncle George's fields on the other side of town. But of course Aunt Em caught on to something and said I 'd better go along with her and Miss Harriet. On the way I sat on the back seat with Miss Harriet, and the more I watched her, the more I knew it must be true about her having a love story, because there was something different about her.

She was always cheerful and bright and sweet, but now there was a sort of happiness about everything she said and did that was different from the old cheerfulness. It seemed to me perfectly scandalous for two people as old as Doctor and Miss Harriet to be in love, and yet Miss Harriet looked so pretty, and her color was so bright, that you could n't think of her as being old, and as for Doctor, anybody would be crazy not to love him. I could see a change in her plain enough, but Aunt Em did n't seem to notice it.

When we got to Mrs. McDade's the first thing we saw was two of the smallest Flannigans playing in the sand before the front steps, and Mrs. McDade sitting on

the porch watching them and looking very happy and pleased.

"They 're mine," she said in a proud voice, before we could say even how-do-you-do. "I 've adopted 'em both, all tight and legal — papers made out and signed."

You can imagine how surprised we were. "Well of all things!" said Aunt Em in a helpless kind of way. "What did you want with two?"

Mrs. McDade answered that they would be company for each other and would n't be so likely to get homesick. "Ain't they a pretty little pair, Mrs. Baxby? I always have wanted children, and when I heard there was a new Flannigan baby — "

"A *new* one?" gasped out Miss Harriet.

"Yes, day before yesterday — which makes 'leven — I just went right over to bring the other baby home and adopt it, if they 'd let me. But the other one ain't but thirteen months old and still a-teethin', and so I decided on them two; they 're so near an age 't would be a sin to separate 'em. Jamie 's four and Aileen 's three, and they come to me without a whimper, soon as they got over their first shyness."

They certainly were pretty babies, with their blue eyes and black curls. Becky had made blue linen rompers for them, and she was sewing away at a machine in the hall, making up stacks of little clothes.

Dressed alike, it was hard to tell Aileen from Jamie, except that they had cut Jamie's mop of black curls a little shorter. I went out to play with them and showed them how to build mountains in the sand, but I could

hear them talking on the porch — the grown people, I mean. Aunt Em asked Mrs. McDade if she had trouble getting the parents' consent, and Mrs. McDade said yes, at first she did; but when she promised to bring them back often for a visit, and told them how she would take care of the children and have them educated and send them regularly to Sunday-school, and how, after they were fifteen, she would give them up if they wanted to go back to their own family, well, the Flannigans gave in and signed the papers; Mrs. McDade had carried a lawyer with her. She said she did n't think Mr. Flannigan cared much about it, but it went hard with poor Mrs. Flannigan. She cried about it, but she saw it was for the children's good, and she was willing to give them up for their own sake.

Aunt Em told her she certainly was a good woman, but she wondered she was n't afraid of the children's future. She said you never could tell how children whose father was a drunkard would turn out, and Mrs. McDade said, well at any rate the poor little things would have a better chance to make something of themselves with her than they would in that crowded Flannigan home. And then she said the Flannigans were going to move to Tennessee next year anyway, and she thought everything would turn out all right. Aunt Em said she truly hoped so.

They stayed a long time, and got out their sewing, and talked about lots of other things. Mrs. McDade had news from Pauline. She had received a letter that very day telling her that they had settled in a nice little town

in Colorado and that Selmer was going in the drug-store business right away, and Pauline said in her letter that they were both very happy. "And that 's a big load off my mind," Mrs. McDade finished up by saying. Miss Harriet and Aunt Em were glad too, and Aunt Em said things were turning out all right after all. But it did n't seem to me that things were turning out all right at all while Katherine was breaking her heart and Dr. Phil's eyes had that hurt look.

After a while Aunt Em told Mrs. McDade that she had been formally elected a member of the Charity Association and that she must be sure to come to the next meeting, which was at Mrs. Peters' house. You never saw anyone so pleased. She said she would be glad to come, and she hoped the ladies had forgiven her for saying the things she did when she was so wrought up over Pauline. Miss Harriet told her that none of them thought she had said too much and there was nothing to forgive.

Before we left Mrs. McDade carried us upstairs and showed us the room she was getting ready for her adopted children. It was a big square room next to her own, and there were four windows to keep it bright and sunny. She said she was going to have it repapered and have a border of all kinds of amusing pictures, and she was going to Bradford soon to get the furniture and buy clothes and books and toys for them, and she had a bed on the porch for them right by her own. She said she was going to train them from the beginning not to shut out the Beneficent Influences, and she meant to

sleep on the porch until November as long as she lived. I could see Aunt Em and Miss Harriet did n't approve of that, but they did n't say anything.

Going home Miss Harriet said she was glad Mrs. McDade had adopted those babies, because she would get a lot of pleasure out of bringing them up, and they would keep her busy and give her new interests, and in her opinion the little Flannigans were very lucky indeed. Aunt Em said perhaps so, but it was a great venture, adopting children of that class, though she had n't a word to say against Mrs. Flannigan, poor soul!

That night Billy was just full of dynamite. He could n't talk about anything else except how those men would dig a hole under a big stump, put a stick in and lay a fuse, then light the fuse and fly. And in a minute — bang! Where there had been a tough old stump, there was now only a deep hole.

" I want to go and see them do that to-morrow. May I, father? " I said. But Billy spoke up in his bossish way, " It 's no place for a girl. Is it, father? "

" It 's no place for anyone whose business is not there," answered father, and Billy changed the subject at once by saying that Eli had cut his foot that afternoon with the hoe. It was n't much of a cut, but it got father's mind off the blasting for a minute. It never switched Aunt Em off, though, and she said she 'd wear us both out if we went near that field.

CHAPTER XXIV

A Discovery

"If this was a real cave instead of just a curve, we could make a dandy prison out of it," said Billy.

We were playing smugglers down at the base of the rock-pile. Billy had smuggled father's little pocket flash-light, and he was turning it here and there against the wall of rock and the fringe of little trees that grew around, making the shut-in place that we called our Pirates' Den. Once when the round, white spot of light fell on a thick clump of dead brush, a little green snake dashed out and went twisting away across the Pasture.

Then Billy went to the crack that ran up the wall and turned the light into it. He stood there so long with his eye glued to that crack that I got impatient and said I 'd quit playing if he was going to stand gazing into an old fissure all day. Then he said in a funny voice, almost a whisper, "Come here, Bea! Hold the light steady, and — *look!*"

I did what he told me, and then, just as he had done, I stood like I was frozen and simply stared and stared. That crack spread out inside bigger than I had ever thought of. It went back wider and wider and made a cave that looked about as big as a clothes closet, and

where the light fell there were thousands of little sparkles, yellow and flashing, like diamonds.

"What *is* it, Billy?" I asked after a while, under my breath.

"It 's *gold*," said Billy solemnly. "We 've discovered a gold mine."

I said I always thought gold mines were buried deep and had to be dug out.

"All of 'em ain't," answered Billy. "This is one of the kind that 's right on the surface."

We sat down by the rock and talked for a long time, and every now and then we 'd look into the crack again, and there would be all those yellow sparkles, bright as stars. I said I wished that crack was big enough for us to get out some of the gold, so that we could take it home and show it to father. I wanted right away to go and tell him, but Billy said no, he had a better plan than that, and it would be more exciting to open up that crack and then go and bring father and let him see for himself.

"If we tell him," said Billy, "he will say we saw a little quartz and imagined all the rest, and he 'll want to know what I was doing with his flashlight, and end up by making us stay out of the Pasture. That 's just what he 'll do. I know him."

Then I wanted to know how on earth we could open the crack.

"Don't you worry about that crack, daughter," he answered in his know-it-all kind of way. "I know a way to open it. You just sit tight and leave it to your Uncle Billy about that crack. I guess there ain't any

old crack living that can hold out if I get to work on it with — *something I know about.*"

I thought about how he had talked the night before, and little chills began to run up my back. "*Billy!*" I gasped. "You don't mean — *dynamite!*"

"That 's all right, sister, about what I mean. Don't you worry. I guess what will take out stumps and rocks will open up anything else," said Billy, looking as if he knew all about it.

"But you have n't got any. And how are you going to get it?" I asked.

Billy acted like he had been used to dynamite all his life and knew how to work it just like he knew how to shoot a popgun.

"Just leave all that to your uncle," he said. "I was n't watching those men yesterday for nothing. Honest, Bea, it 's just as easy as falling off a log." He dropped his bragging way and went on talking like he always does. "They 've got a place down under some rocks where they keep it stored, and just a wide board laid across the opening, and the fuses and caps are in a tool-house that 's not locked. I could slip over there to-night about dark and get the whole outfit. One stick would do. It 's dry as powder, no sign of rain. But anyway I 'll wrap it all up in my raincoat, and coming back I can cut through the Pasture and leave it right here in this dry corner, close up under the rock, until morning. To-morrow 's Sunday. We can dress like we are going to Sunday-school and then slip down here and set the whole thing off. Why, Bea, we 'd have the whole state going, and

things in the papers about how we discovered and opened up a gold mine!"

I thought Billy's plan was perfectly grand, but it seemed to me like too big a thing for nobody to see but just us two. I could n't help wishing there were going to be more people in it. After I thought for a while I had a tremendous idea myself, almost bigger than Billy's, and just the thought of it excited me so I could hardly get my breath.

"Billy, I see a way to make father and Uncle George friends again by this!" I said.

"Jehosophat! You have n't got any fool idea about telling *them,* have you!" he yelled at me.

"Well, you listen," I said; and then I told him my idea. What was the use in doing such a tremendous thing as that and not have anybody to see it until it was all over? We would have to tell father just the minute it was done, anyway. Why not have him and Uncle George to be there just in time to see the crack split open? And then, when they saw what was hidden there, they would know they ought to make friends and work the mine as partners. They 'd see how silly it was to be quarreling over the Pasture *then,* and they 'd be very glad to own just half of such a place as that, and they 'd go ahead and act like Christian brothers ought to. And more than that, they 'd be the richest men in the whole state, because nobody else owns a gold mine.

"All that sounds mighty fine," at last Billy broke in, "but what I want to know is how you are going to work it so that father and Uncle George get here just at the

right second and not one minute too soon. Then, instead of glory and gold mines, it would mean a bully switching for you and me and going to bed without any dinner. Of course *that's* a very small thing, *very* insignificant, to get a whipping and have no dinner! But I'd really like to know, just the same, how you're going to manage it." At times, when he wants to, Billy can use big words and be very sarcastic, like father.

But I had thought the plan all out, even to getting father and Uncle George there just at the right minute. I would write them each a letter, telling them just what we were going to do. On Sunday mornings the post-office is only open from nine till nine-thirty, so father and Uncle George get their mail about the same time. We always have breakfast at eight on Sundays, and father goes over at about a quarter of nine for the mail. Uncle George does the same, and so there was no danger of their getting any letters before nine. By going fast you can get from the post-office to the rocks in fifteen minutes. I knew this because Billy and I had tried it once. I had an idea that father and Uncle George would come pretty fast. Billy could mail the letters while he was going for the dynamite; the office would be closed at that time and no mail would be made up before morning. There was n't the smallest chance that our letters could reach father and Uncle George before nine o'clock, and we would have everything ready to set the dynamite going when we caught the first sight of them coming into the Pasture. In that way they could n't stop us, and the explosion would come just as they got there. It was

all as smooth and plain as A B C, and after Billy saw into it he was just as crazy about my idea as I had been about his.

"Glory hallelujah! But you *have* got a head, Bea — for a girl," he said. We talked it over until we had everything, down to the smallest point, all fixed and ready to carry out. Then we went home and wrote the letters. They were just alike, except for the names. Father's read this way:

DEAR FATHER — You know the crack in the side of the rock wall, where it curves in like a cave? (In the Pasture) Well, there is a gold mine in there!! We found it to-day. We are going to blow up the crack with dynamite so that you can get inside, to-morrow morning — Sunday — at 9:15 sharp, and we respectfully invite you to be present.

BILLY AND BEATRICE.

P.S. We are doing this for you.

We did n't add the postscript to Uncle George's letter.

"That 'll fetch 'em!" said Billy with great enthusiasm, and though it is rather early yet to say it, it certainly did, and I never was so glad of anything in my life either!

Billy and I were so excited we could n't keep still a minute, and it seemed as if supper time would never come. After supper, when it was n't quite dark, he put the letters inside his shirt-waist and we slipped out. I went with him as far as the gate, begging him all the way to be careful and not fall down with the dynamite and explode himself.

"Oh, I'll manage this business O. K.," he said. "Don't you worry! And if they miss me, you say I left my knife over to Johnny Wilbur's and went for it. I *did* leave it there, and I'm going to stop a minute and get it, so you'll be telling the truth."

I hoped they would n't ask me, but it was n't any time after I went back to the house before Aunt Em said, "Do you know where Billy went?" I said what he told me to about his knife, and I felt like Ananias and Sapphira. It was a good thing father went over to Doctor's and was not at home when Billy got back, for he had stayed so long I nearly had nervous prostration, and Aunt Em had asked me three times for gracious' sake what was I so fidgety about. She blessed Billy out for going away without asking and staying so long.

"I told Bea where I was going," he said, looking innocent as a lamb. "I wanted my knife I left at the Wilburs', and I knew Johnny would n't think to bring it with him to Sunday-school to-morrow, and a fellow feels lost without his knife. Say, Aunt Em, the Wilburs' scuppernongs are ripe, and Mrs. Wilbur says you can get as many as you want. I'll drive over Monday and get 'em for you, if you want me to." Aunt Em always makes scuppernong wine in September, and Billy thought he could get her side-tracked from the subject of where he had been.

She was n't any too pleased with him, though, and she said she'd see about the grapes in good time, and the next time he went out after dark without asking, she'd see what father would say about it. Aunt Em always

was hard to get switched off from anything. On Saturday nights she mends the house linen, and when she got out her basket and settled herself by the table in the library, Billy and I slipped out on the porch, and he whispered to me that he had got the whole outfit slick as a button and it was safe in his raincoat down by the rocks. He had mailed the letters too, and everything was all ready.

"Let 's go to bed right now, so morning will come quicker," I said. But Billy said that would n't do at all; if we went upstairs before Aunt Em made us, she 'd know right away something was up, because we never went until she had told us three times. So we went back in the library and played checkers until the clock struck nine and she told us it was time to go upstairs.

Very often when you plan things they go all different from the way you intended, but the next morning every single thing went just like we had planned it. It was a clear, bright day and things went exactly as usual. Billy and I dressed for Sunday-school and went out the barnyard way, as if we were taking the short cut through the Old Meadow Road, and then we slipped right into the Pasture. Billy had a dollar watch that kept very good time, and he was trying to time things so that the explosion would come just exactly at the minute father and Uncle George got there.

Billy said, if it took fifteen minutes to run from the post-office to the rocks, it would take less time if they happened to find a horse or a rig of any kind handy, and we 'd better get it all laid and ready to fire, and then

watch for them. The straightest way was down the Old Meadow Road, so of course they would come that way.

"You watch, Bea, from the top of the rock-pile, and I'll be ready below with the match. The minute you see them coming down the road you call to me and I'll light the fuse, then we'll both run to the other side of the rocks. The fuse burns slow, and we'll have plenty of time, and we'll be perfectly safe on the other side, because it will naturally blow up the rocks in the weakest place, and that is where the crack runs. Come on now; we haven't got any time to lose."

We went into the hollow place, and Billy opened his raincoat very carefully and took out a yellowish stick that looked something like a big fire-cracker.

"If I was to drop that, Bea, we'd be in Kingdom Come before you could say scat," he said, which made me a little uneasy. He handled it easier than eggs and laid it in the crack, close to the ground, where the opening was widest. Very, very gently he pushed it back, and then he got a kind of string, which he called the fuse, and laid it on the ground so that one end went through the crack and touched the end of the stick.

"There's a cap in the end of that stick, Bea," Billy explained to me, while he was fixing it. "One end of the fuse touches the cap. Now when I light the other end, the fuse burns until it reaches the cap. Then the cap explodes; then the dynamite explodes; then the rock explodes!"

I asked Billy what he was doing all that time.

"I 'm running," he said, "and so are you. We are getting away to the other side as fast as we can."

I thought I was excited at the play in Bradford, but I knew now I never had dreamed of what excitement meant until that minute.

Billy got everything all ready, just as he said, and waited, with a match in his hand, while I climbed up the rocks as fast as I could. There was no one in sight up the Old Meadow Road; we waited a few minutes and there was still no one. It was now eighteen minutes after nine, and Billy called up to me, "All right, then. If they don't want to see the show, let 'em stay away! I 'm touching her off! Come on down, Bea, and run down the other side!" Then as I turned to run down the mound I happened to look over towards Uncle George's place, and there he was, coming across the Pasture like he was shot out of a cannon. And a few yards behind him was father, and other people were tearing along back of father. I never saw people run like they did, and Uncle George was a good way ahead of them all. They had cut through Uncle George's place, and I never thought of that, while I was watching the Old Meadow Road. "They are coming, Billy! They are coming!" I screamed, just as Billy ran round the rocks and joined me. We met on the opposite side of the pile from the crack.

Uncle George had lost his hat, and his coat-tails were sailing out behind him. He was running so hard and looked so funny that Billy and I stopped stock-still and stared. We thought we were safe and never dreamed

that any explosion could affect the mound over on the side where we were. But people who think they are safe anywhere in the same field with a stick of dynamite don't know a thing. Uncle George kept coming, and Billy yelled out, "Don't go near the other side! The fuse is burning!"

Uncle George did n't answer a word. He just dashed up to us and snatched me under one arm and Billy under the other, like we were rag dolls, and ran back in the direction he had come from.

"Back! Back!" he shouted to the others. I saw father still coming on, and then it was all so sudden I had hardly got my breath. There came a horrible, tearing noise like all the thunder in heaven had collected in one big clap right behind us. Uncle George ran another step or two, then he stumbled, and we all came crashing down together. Then Billy and I and Uncle George and the Pasture went whirling round and round, and the whole world came to an end.

CHAPTER XXV

What Happened Then

The next thing I knew I had a smothered feeling and was struggling to get out of some tight place. I opened my eyes, and to my surprise found that the tight place was in father's arms, and he had Billy and me crushed up against him and was saying, "Poor little foolish kids!" with a tone in his voice I had never heard before. The tears were coming down his face, and right then it came to me how very much father really loved us. Someone began to work my arms and legs and said, "Bea is not much hurt, only stunned; but I am afraid Billy's arm is broken." And another voice said, "I believe George Crawford is dead!"

Father dropped us with a groan and turned to where Uncle George was lying, with a gash on his head and the blood streaming down his face. I nearly screamed at the sight. Dr. Phil was there and several men who had been at the post-office when Uncle George read his letter, and from every side of the Pasture people were running to us. From the direction of our place came Eli, with Aunt Em and Aunt Sally right behind him; and even then I could n't help wondering how they managed to climb that wall. From Uncle George's side

Mandy and Abe came flying, and people were coming through the hole in the Meadow Road hedge.

Dr. Phil was feeling Uncle George's pulse, and father was kneeling by him, wiping the blood off his face, and he kept saying "George! George!" and there was that same new tone in his voice.

"He 's not dead, is he, Philip?" father asked, looking very pale and miserable.

"Oh, no," said Dr. Phil, "but we can't tell yet how badly he is hurt. A piece of rock must have struck him. We must get him home. Take hold of his knees there, two of you. And, Colonel, you help me lift him at the shoulders. Mandy, get home as fast as you can and get Mr. Crawford's bed ready. Abe, you hit it like greased lightning over to our place and bring Uncle John back with you and my medical case — don't forget that. Hurry! And you, Eli, pick up Billy and bring him along with us. Look out there! Don't hurt him. Can you stand it, Billy, old man?"

Dr. Phil gave orders thick and fast, and everyone did just as he said. Aunt Em tried to help Eli with Billy, but when they picked him up and his arm dangled, he fainted, and Aunt Em turned whiter than a sheet, and Aunt Sally began to carry on, crying out, "Lawdy mussy! Dey done kilt my chile! Dey done kilt my chile!" until somebody told her to keep quiet, for heaven's sake, and look after me, for I had begun to cry and my knees were both skinned. Somebody gave her a handkerchief, and she tore it in two pieces and tied up my knees, and then the whole crowd of us followed

the others over to Uncle George's house. Aunt Sally lectured me every inch of the way. The bars at the barn gate were torn entirely away so that they could pass through with Uncle George and Billy, and I never shall forget how strange it seemed to be walking through that barnyard and then across the back yard, which was full of fruit trees and chrysanthemum beds and little wire-net chicken coops, where the fryers for the table were kept up. We always keep our table fryers in a latticed chicken house in the barnyard. It seemed still stranger to think that Mary and Carey knew every crack and corner of this back yard, just like I knew ours.

Those things went flashing through my mind, and yet all the time I was sobbing and clinging to Aunt Sally's hand. They carried Uncle George upstairs to his room, but Billy was laid on a couch in the hall downstairs; and then Aunt Em said she would attend to Billy until the doctors could get to him. Of course Dr. Phil and father had to stay with Uncle George until they could find out how much he was hurt. Someone had gone for Dr. Haines, and soon both he and Doctor would be there to help Dr. Phil. Mandy and Aunt Sally were running here and there, as they were sent, and several people were standing around ready to help if they were needed, and only I was alone, for I did n't dare to go farther than just inside the door, where I could see Billy.

He had come to, and Aunt Em was sponging his forehead with cologne water and telling him to try to bear it a little while. But Billy only shivered like he was cold,

and he was so white and quiet that I am sure Aunt Em was as frightened as I was.

After a while father and Dr. Phil came down and bent over Billy. They cut his sleeve off to see how badly he was hurt, and when they touched his arm, Billy cried out suddenly, and then Aunt Em said in a desperate kind of voice, "Lord help us! He 's fainted again!"

I just ran into a corner and dropped down on the floor with my face to the wall, and if I could have died that minute, I would have done it. They did not seem to see me at all. I heard Dr. Phil say, "There 's Uncle John coming in at the gate, and you 've sent for Haines. I 'm glad of that. It will take two of us for Billy, poor little chap! It 's a bad break; the bone 's through."

Aunt Em groaned and then asked about Uncle George, and Dr. Phil answered, "I think he 'll be all right; bad cut on the head, lost a good deal of blood, bruised up a good bit, but no bones broken. I don't think he is more than badly stunned. A piece of flying stone caught him squarely between the shoulders and knocked him down; he cut his head in falling. Here comes Dr. Haines now. What do you say, Uncle John? Shall we, you and I, look after Billy while Dr. Haines takes care of Mr. Crawford? We will need you just at first, Mrs. Baxby."

Then I heard Doctor's voice. "Yes, that 's all right, Philip. We 'll take Billy into the library, and — he 's coming to now. Why, hello, Billy! What do you mean by breaking yourself up without letting me know beforehand? Good thing I happened along. Don't worry now,

son. You shan't be hurt. No, we 're not going to touch your arm." Then there were new footsteps coming hurriedly in, and Doctor's voice again.

"Good morning, Haines. If you will go upstairs to Mr. Crawford, you 'll find Wilbur and Jones there. Philip and I will look after Billy. Yes, broken arm. But what 's a broken arm! That happens to all of us at one time or another. A few more drops, Philip; he 's going — "

"No — I 'm — not — either!" came Billy's voice, and it sounded so weak and queer that you could hardly recognize it for Billy.

All this I heard in bits, for my head was buried in my arms. Then for the first time Aunt Em noticed me.

"There 's Bea! I did n't know she was here. You 'd better take her home, Sally, and get Billy's room ready. No, there 's nothing you can do. He will soon be under the chloroform, and Doctor is looking after him. Take her away at once, Sally. We 'll bring Billy home after a while."

Aunt Sally was grumbling when she came over to where I was huddled up in the corner. She just picked me up in her arms and carried me out of the house. At the gate I insisted on getting down and walking.

"But ain't yo're knees stiff, honey, whar dey 's all skint up?" she asked.

They were, and they hurt like anything; but when you are nearly thirteen you don't like to be carried around like you were a baby, just because you skinned your knees a little. We went by the Big Road, because

Aunt Sally refused flat to cut through the Pasture. She said she did n't know what minute it might blow up under her feet.

I was so miserable about Billy that I guess she did n't have the heart to scold me any more. She told me they paralyzed him with chloroform so that he would n't feel any pain when they set his arm. When we got home she washed my knees, and put salve on them, and tied them up again, and then I helped her to get Billy's room ready.

While we were spreading fresh sheets on the bed she said, "Who thunk up all dat devilment anyhow, you or Billy?" I told her I did, for I would have died before I 'd have told on Billy when he was in so much trouble. "I moughter knowed it," she grumbled, "caze Billy ain't no bad chile nachelly. Hit 's inginnerly other chillun whut gits him inter mischief."

When we were passing the Pasture I peeped through the hedge and saw people standing about the rock-pile, and I wondered if all the gold we saw had blown out, and I hoped they would n't be carrying it off. Nobody came for dinner, and Aunt Sally had to set it all away, for I could hardly swallow a mouthful. It would n't have been so bad if we had telephones and could call up people like they do in Bradford; then I could have found out every minute how Billy was. But the only telephone in Pine Grove was the one at the General Merchandise Store, and that goes to Bradford. Father says we are going to have telephones all over Pine Grove next year.

It was four o'clock before father and Aunt Em came with Billy. Eli brought them in the surrey, and father

and Eli carried Billy upstairs and put him to bed. His face was n't white now, it was all red with fever, and he looked half asleep. He talked to me a little, and said he was feeling all right, and wanted to know what my knees were tied up for. But Aunt Em said I 'd better not stay in the room, because Billy must be quiet. Then she darkened the room, and Aunt Sally sat by his bed and fanned him.

Before father went back over to Uncle George's he called me to him, and I was almost afraid to go. But I need n't have been, for he put his arm around me and said, " Bea, your Uncle George is still unconscious, but they say he will live. His head seemed to be clearing some when I came away. However, he has offered his life for you and Billy just the same as if he had been killed, and I want you never to forget while you live that you and Billy owe your lives to him. If he had been one moment later, if he had not outrun even me, you would both, without doubt, be dead now."

" But, father," I said, " we were on the opposite side of the mound from the crack, and the rock-pile is perfectly solid; so we thought — "

" Wrong there, my dear. The rock-pile was perfectly hollow, as you and Billy have thoroughly demonstrated. You were standing on a thin crust that is now scattered everywhere in fragments. The explosive, being in a small pocket of the rock which opened into a large, spongily formed chamber, simply split that mound from stem to stern, and it is no longer a solid mound, but an entirely unsuspected cave."

I asked if it hurt the little clump of cedars on top, and father said the little cedars were gone. They never knew what struck them; where they stood was now a yawning fissure.

"And now, Bea, listen to me," he said. Then he gave me just about the soundest lecture I ever had in my life and one I 'll never forget. I learned that women must be wiser than men, and girls are expected to be more thoughtful than boys.

"Why, father?" I asked.

And he said that as a rule girls were born with an instinct of discretion, which most boys did n't have; most boys were more thoughtless and reckless than girls — they were just born that way. And when boys want to do foolish, dangerous things, girls must n't encourage them, but they must try to keep them from doing those things; and if they find they can't, then they must go straight and tell their fathers — and that is n't being a tattle-tale, he said. And then he told me that boys and men were 'most always like that — they all needed a woman's wise, level head to keep them straight.

This was a perfectly new idea to me. Always before I had been following like a little poodle at Billy's heels and doing anything he wanted to do, but now I found out that instead of following him I must sometimes step to one side and yank him out of danger.

"Do you suppose Mrs. Peters has to keep Mr. Peters straight?" I asked.

And father said, "Without a doubt she does."

"And you? Does Aunt Em keep —" I stopped, for I did n't have the nerve to finish that question.

Father finished it. "Keep me straight? She most certainly does."

Well, of all things! And I had always thought that father ruled our roost, from Aunt Em down to Eli!

Father said he was glad that Billy had been manly enough to take all the blame on himself; he had told them all about it before his arm was set. Even while he was suffering so he was afraid I would be punished, and the last thing he said before he went entirely under the chloroform was, "Don't send Bea to bed, Aunt Em. She did n't do a thing."

Dear, precious Billy! I know there 's not another boy in the whole world like him.

Father wound up his lecture by saying, "I want you and Billy to remember always what you owe to your Uncle George."

It was the strangest thing to hear father say "your Uncle George" in that gentle tone of voice, when I had never before in all my life heard him mention Uncle George's name, except once or twice when he was angry or sarcastic. It was hard to understand. Here was father hating Uncle George for years and years on account of that Pasture, and then all in one minute the whole thing was forgotten because Uncle George had rushed up faster than anyone else and saved us. I could n't get used to it.

"And will you and Uncle George be friends now? And will we visit and spend the day with each other like other kin-folks do?" I asked, not knowing how to believe it *could* be true.

"If I have anything to do with it, we will," father said. "There 'll be no more of this foolishness about the Pasture. If George feels that it ought to belong to him, he can have it — every inch of it."

I was so surprised I could n't say a word. Aunt Em was surprised too. She had just come in to say that Billy was asleep and resting quietly.

"I don't know that I 'd go as far as that, Will," she said. "You 'd have done the same thing for George's children. But now maybe you two can come to an understanding and use that place jointly, as I have always believed your father intended you to do."

"And be partners in the gold mine," I added.

Then father wanted to know, as if he had just remembered it, where on earth Billy and I got that gold-mine idea, and I told him about looking through the crack and seeing things sparkling all about in the walls. He answered that, as a boy, he had peeped into that crack a hundred times and had never seen a sparkle. So I asked him if he had ever thrown a flashlight in it. At that father looked at me thoughtfully and said in his funny, slow way, "Oh! I see. That 's where my pocket light was." Then he said he believed he would go through the Pasture on his way back to Uncle George's and take a look at the rocks and see what it was Billy and I thought we saw.

"It 's very amazing after all, Em," he added, "to learn at this late day that the mound is hollow. Do you think father ever guessed it?"

Aunt Em said no, she thought not, because when she

was a child she had played about those rocks, and she knew her brother did the same thing when he was a boy, and she had never heard of anyone guessing that there was a cave. They knew the crack widened a little inside, but they never thought of anything more than a little fissure.

Father put on his hat and was about to start, when Dr. Phil came in, looking very eager and interested.

"Do you know, Colonel, what a find Billy and Bea have made?" he said, holding out a piece of something thin and shiny. "Your brother was doing well, and Uncle John was with him, so I thought I'd run over and see how Billy is getting on, and took the short cut through the Pasture. I wanted to see what change had been made in the map of that place anyway, and I found a number of people staring into the fissure and marveling over the fact that your rock-pile was full of — this!"

Father took the shiny stuff and then exclaimed, "*Mica,* by George! And the kids thought it was gold."

I never had even heard of mica before, and I was so disappointed I felt sick, because I was so sure it would be either gold or diamonds.

Dr. Phil looked at me, then he laughed and said, "Don't you fret about the gold, Bea. That bed of mica will make you the daughter of a rich man!"

But I still felt bitterly disappointed, for being the daughter of a rich man is *nothing* to discovering a gold mine,

CHAPTER XXVI

Old Man Bennet Makes a Move

In a few days Uncle George was better, though he was still not able to move about, for the cut on his head had been very deep and bad, and his back was dreadfully bruised and sore where the rock had struck him. In falling he had wrenched his ankle too, so he was laid up for some time.

Aunt Lou had come at once and brought the twins, but Uncle George had insisted on Katherine staying where she was for some weeks longer, and Aunt Lou made her do it, though Katherine wanted to come. But she was just beginning to improve a little, and they did n't want to give her a setback, so Aunt Lou did n't tell her everything, and it was a long time before she knew how badly Uncle George had been hurt.

Every day father went to see Uncle George, and when he came back one day about a week after the accident, bringing Mary and Carey to spend the day, I almost had to pinch myself to believe I was awake. We were perfectly used to each other in the Pasture, but here in our house, where they never had been before, it was very different. At first they were stiff as pokers and stared around at everything, like it was some kind of side-show. Billy was up, with his arm in plaster, but he

was n't allowed to do anything much. He and I were embarrassed too, and we did n't know what to talk about.

I asked Carey if she liked the water at Sulphur Springs, and she said, "No, I did n't. It disappealed to me." And then we were all shy and stiff again.

But it all wore off when Aunt Em said in a natural way, just as if Mary and Carey had been coming to our house all their lives, "Don't you children want to go and gather the pears that dropped last night? Here, Bea, take this basket; and don't shake the trees, just get the windfalls. You can go, Billy, but be very careful. Don't run a step or try to climb on anything." And off we went to the orchard, where the grass was speckled with sweet, yellow pears.

After we ate all we wanted we carried a basketful back to Aunt Em, and by that time the twins were perfectly at home, and we were all laughing and chattering just as if we were in the Pasture.

After Uncle George was up he and father would go to the Pasture together, and it seemed strange to see them at the rock-pile, friendly as could be, talking and making gestures towards different parts of the place, as if they were planning things they meant to do. Everybody knew by that time they had made up their old quarrel and were going to develop the mica cave that Billy and I had found. Men father called experts had come and examined the cave, and they called it a very rich find. You would n't have dreamed, from the way the mound looked outside, that the cave was so large;

it went under the ground a long way, and the walls were streaked with veins of mica. It was in all the papers, and no wonder Billy and I felt proud, although father had given Billy such a talking to as he never had before, as soon as he was better from his hurt.

When Billy told me about it he would n't tell me all father had said, but he wound up by saying, "Gee! But he hit straight out from the shoulder, Bea! And I guess after this I 'll have to remember that girls are not strong like boys, and they have to be protected."

I wondered what father did say to him, but I thought maybe it would be best not to tell him just what father said to me, about girls having to keep boys straight.

The twins could n't get over missing all the excitement, and when we stood looking at the hole where the crack used to be, and the wide, zigzag opening that ran clear across to the other side, Carey sighed hard and said, "It will always be the result of my life that I was n't here!"

Everything between the families now went beautifully except Aunt Em and Aunt Lou. They were still stiff and looking sidewise at each other, and as Aunt Sally said, "smilin' entirely too perlite fer kinery." Father said they found it hard to swallow each other after fighting all these years, and Aunt Em said 't was nothing of the kind, and that even before the quarrel she and Aunt Lou had never hit it off well, but that for her part she was willing to do anything to keep the peace. And to prove it she had the surrey hitched and went right over and took Aunt Lou to ride.

Before we blew up the rocks Old Man Bennet had been in the condition he had been in since Dr. Phil talked to him, feeble and wandering if anyone tried to talk seriously to him; but soon after all this his mind all at once cleared up, and he sent for father, and they had a long talk.

At dinner time father came back, mad as anything, and said, "That old codger's been bluffing all along. His mind has n't been so feeble as he pretended, and he only decided to make a clean breast of it when he saw the game was up. He's now going West to live with Selmer and Pauline, since the secret of the rocks is discovered."

This was news.

"A sudden decision, was n't it?" asked Aunt Em.

"Very sudden, very indeed," answered father. "Two days after the rocks were opened he was negotiating, secretly, to sell his store and lease his house and outlying lands to Anderson Jones. To-day he closed the deal; to-morrow he's leaving."

"Did he tell you what he's been coming here and searching for all these years?" I asked.

Father and Aunt Em glanced at each other with the look they use which means, "We must be careful what we say before the children."

"The paper he wanted had something to do with the mica, did n't it, father?" Billy asked, before my question had been answered.

"Perhaps so," father said. I said I could n't see what *he* had to do with it, it was n't his place, and

he could n't get anything out of it; and again father and Aunt Em glanced at each other.

"Oh, shucks, father!" said Billy. "Bea and I know all about lots of it, anyhow. I don't see why you want to keep us from knowing it all. I bet you anything I 've got that Old Man Bennet wanted to get hold of some kind of paper that told about there being a cave, or something like that, and then sell it to you and Uncle George for a big price. Honest now, was n't that what he was making a clean breast about? He knew he had to explain to you, and after the secret was shown up, there was n't any use in holding out, so he 'd just as well tell. And then of course he 'd be ashamed to live here, so that 's why he 's going West. It 's easy to see all that!"

Billy certainly was smart at times, and having his arm in plaster made him feel safe to say all kinds of bold things to father and Aunt Em. I thought father would be mad and tell him he talked entirely too much, but he was so amused at the way Billy guessed it right off-hand that he only laughed and said, "Well, Billy, you hit it this time; but just remember this —" and he stopped laughing and looked at us very straight — "Bennet has acted the rascal, but he 's old, and he 's sick, and he has owned up; and now I shall not expect you and Bea to do any talking about this out of the family. I don't want the community gossiping about it. Do you understand?"

Then Billy told father we had been knowing things a long time and had n't told yet, and I added, thinking

of Miss Harriet, that we knew still other secrets we had n't told; at which Billy nudged me hard and I hushed.

I wished Dr. Phil had been there. He had gone to Bradford and would n't be back for three days, and I had a feeling that he was going to hate for Old Man Bennet to get clear away while he was gone. I felt dreadfully disappointed. After all these weeks of excitement about ghosts and secret papers it seemed too bad for things to turn out so tame. Not even a murder mystery! Just a mean, greedy old man hunting a secret about a cave, so that he could get money out of it.

I told Billy that to get a good mystery, or any real excitement, you simply had to think it up. But Billy did n't agree. He said he would n't ask for any more excitement than we had blowing up that cave and finding what was in it. Of course that part of it was all right, but I was disappointed, just the same, over the way the ghost business had turned out. And I was right about Dr. Phil. I found out what day he was coming and went to the train to meet him; and sure enough, when I told him Mr. Bennet had gone, he looked like Billy sometimes looks at the table when he has knocked over his glass of milk.

"Blessed if the old man did n't get one over on me!" he said. "He 's slicker than I thought, but he 's liable to pay for it. He has n't the strength for that trip, and he 'll get there prostrated."

Instead of going home first he went straight over to our house to see father, and they talked a long time on

the porch. Father did n't send me away, because I knew so much anyhow; and I listened for all I was worth and understood a good deal of it, though they tried to use words I would n't catch on to.

"There 's something obscure about it, Philip. The thing does n't ring true, and it 's my belief he 's plain crazy. He gave me to understand that physical infirmities had brought about a quickening of conscience, and he confessed that he had learned through an old rumor years ago that there was unsuspected treasure of some kind in the Pasture, also that father had some kind of paper connected with the secret. Well, he was after documentary evidence and was planning a campaign of — blackmail — or graft. He declares he was only going to demand a share in the treasure discovered, whatever it might be. He was very regretful, and asked only to be forgiven and allowed to go in peace to his son; because now that the secret was exposed, there was nothing to tell. I let it go at that, though I own I gave him a pretty sharp piece of my mind. But the whole thing seems unreasonable, Philip. He must be demented. Why should father have kept such evidence from George and myself?"

Dr. Phil looked thoughtful, with a far-awayness in his eyes, and I could n't help thinking how strange it was that he knew things about all this that father had never dreamed of. I just had a feeling that he did.

When father finished he said, "You are right on one point, Colonel. The thing is not logical. He may have made you think he was making a clean breast, but I

don't believe a word of it! The accidental discovery of that cave was very convenient for him; it gave him an opening for a plausible story. He had no suspicion of that mica, in my mind, and the question still remains, *What* was he looking for?"

Father looked doubtful, and I felt perfectly astonished, for I thought that question was settled. I did n't wait to hear them talk any longer, but ran out to the barn to tell Billy. He pretended that he was n't so surprised after all.

"I thought all along there was something back of it," he said mysteriously, "and *now* I wonder what the next move 's going to be."

We children were having so much fun visiting each other's houses that we did n't play in the Pasture quite so much as usual. It was more interesting to go to Uncle George's house and have the twins show me all their rooms, and pictures, and albums, and things like that, and have them come to our house and see all our things. It surprised me tremendously to find that Uncle George was really a very nice man, and could tell funny stories, and be amusing, like anyone would naturally expect of an uncle; and Aunt Lou could be pleasant too, and make us have lovely times, and feel at home in her house. I had always thought of them as perfectly dreadful persons. The twins said they felt the same way about father and Aunt Em, and Carey and father took quite a fancy to each other, though the twins both used to feel awfully afraid of him.

So we visited back and forth every day, but we did n't

entirely desert the Pasture. Somehow it seemed like a different place now. The barn gates on both sides had been rebuilt so that they would open, and where the little hole in the hedge, opening on the Old Meadow Road, used to be, there was now a wide bar-gate. If our Pasture had been a circus, people would n't have been any more curious about it. They came in and walked about, looking at everything, especially the cave, which father and Uncle George had boarded up at the entrance until they were ready to have it worked. But before the cave was closed they carried us all through it — Billy and me, and the twins, and Aunt Lou, and Aunt Em, and Miss Harriet. It was hard to believe that we had climbed and played for years all over that mound, never dreaming of the big, black hole beneath us. The fissure running across the top, which the explosion had made, let in light enough for us to see by, though it was dim and the air was close and musty. Wherever the light from father's pocket lamp fell you could see the starry sparkles which had led Billy to blow open the crack. We seemed to be walking, or rather stumbling along, on rough, uneven rocks, and Aunt Lou held up her skirts and said, "Mercy! What a horrid black place! It makes me nervous!"

Aunt Em and Miss Harriet did n't care very much about exploring either, especially when we came to a place where you had to lie down and crawl through, if you wanted to go any farther. So father and Uncle George stopped when we reached that place, and we all

went back, though Billy was crazy to go right on as far as the cave went.

"No farther to-day, son," said father. "We 'll wait until the cave is more thoroughly opened up and examined before we pilot a body of helpless females through that hole."

And Miss Harriet said for her part she was ready to turn and explore our way out to the sunlight.

CHAPTER XXVII

Miss Harriet Expresses Herself

There was a look in Aunt Em's face as if she was amazed and scandalized.

"I can't get used to the idea, Will. I never thought of such a thing! Was there any affair there, years ago?" she said, as they came up the steps. I was on the porch, but they did n't seem to pay any attention to me, for they sat down and went right on talking. Aunt Em had come from Miss Harriet's, and I suppose father had joined her as she came through the Pasture, for I knew he had been out at the rocks. Father seemed very interested in what she had been telling him.

"Oh yes," he answered. "There was something of that kind before I was married. But it never seemed to go very far. I had long ago forgotten all about it. I remember, now, they used to go together some — not enough to make the usual gossip and speculation — and then one married and the other seemed to be not the marrying kind, for there were other suitors, I know; our friend of the nocturnal rambling proclivities, for one. I don't think, however, she ever gave *him* a thought. And now, after all these years! It 's amazing, Em."

"And both of them poorer than Job's turkey," said Aunt Em, as if she did n't approve of it, whatever it was. "She says she does n't mind the poverty, she 's used to it. But he feels unhappy over not being able to give her more, and he 's afraid of becoming a burden. Poor things! Have you ever noticed, Will, how often it is that the most worthy people — those who really count in making life sweeter and the world a better place — are handicapped by poverty, while many who are of least use or help to the world flourish and prosper?"

"Yes, Em; I 've noticed that," father answered. "And I 've noticed, too, how some of the flourishing, green bay trees are — cut down."

Of course they did n't think I understood, but I had a pretty good idea that they were talking about Doctor and Miss Harriet, and that Miss Harriet had been telling Aunt Em a lot of things.

Aunt Em sighed a little and said, "Well, it may be all right, and again they may regret it. Of course there 'll be no further developments — very soon. It 's only five months since — you know — and they 'll wait a year at least. But — er — she thought that you and I, as old friends, ought to know."

"Who, Aunt Em? Know what?" I asked when she paused. Aunt Em was stiff and proper in a second.

"I 've often told you, Bea, not to ask 'who?' when people are talking and not mentioning names. We are speaking of things that happened — or started — long before you were born, and that you know nothing of. Don't cultivate undue curiosity, and don't concern your-

self so much over what older people are talking about. I've told you before that it's very bad manners."

All the same I knew well enough they were talking about Miss Harriet. I suppose Aunt Em meant by "it will be a year at least" that Miss Harriet and Doctor would marry in a year. I wondered why they didn't marry when they were young, and when they married now I wondered whether Miss Harriet would move over to his house or he would live in hers. I concluded that she'd go to his, because it was larger. If he ever had a chance to marry her, I didn't see how he *could* have married Mrs. Willingham; but as Dr. Phil says, people are funny about marrying. You never can tell what they'll do.

Doctor and Miss Harriet didn't show in the least that they had a secret. Nobody knew a thing about it but father and Aunt Em, and Dr. Phil, and Billy and myself, and only Dr. Phil knew that Billy and I knew. But it seems as if anyone might have guessed, because Miss Harriet looked so much prettier and younger and Doctor seemed stronger and happier, though he couldn't be dearer and kinder than he always had been.

One afternoon late in September, father and Billy drove over to Zeb Jackson's place to get Ben. Zeb had sent word that Ben was all right again, and Billy couldn't rest a minute until he got him home. It would be great fun to have Ben back. Before he was poisoned he used to romp with us in the Pasture and play about in the Branch just as if he was another child and not a dog.

That afternoon Aunt Em and Aunt Lou had gone over to see Mrs. McDade, and Aunt Em certainly had a time of it persuading Aunt Lou to go.

"But we have to draw the line *somewhere,*" said Aunt Lou, "and when we begin to recognize people of that class, there 's no telling where it will end. It is very detrimental to — er — good society." But in the end Aunt Em had her way — she always does — and they drove off together in our surrey.

There was a woman sewing at Aunt Lou's house, and Mary and Carey were staying in to try on their school dresses, for Uncle George had decided to send them to Miss Williams' school when the fall term opened. So, as I had no one to keep me company, I went over to Miss Harriet's, and she and I sat on the porch and talked about a great many things.

She told me how finding that great bed of mica might make father a much richer man, but that I must n't let that spoil me and make me proud. "When you grow up, Bea, you may have finer things and finer clothes than some of your companions, but never forget, my dear, that fine clothes and plenty of money will not make *you* one bit finer. It 's what 's in your heart and what 's in your mind that will make you fine or make you ordinary. If you keep your heart and mind sweet and kind and generous, you will be happy, whether things go just right or not; and if you don't keep them so, you will be discontented and unhappy, no matter how fine your house or your clothes may be." She had just said that when the gate clicked, and Dr. Phil came in and joined us.

"What are you lecturing Bea about?" he said, stretching himself on the porch bench with a cushion under his head. Miss Harriet let him act just as if he were kinfolks and belonged there, but that was no new thing. From the very first they had been regular chums.

"I was n't exactly lecturing, I was just telling Bea that money is n't the greatest thing in the world. Don't you want another cushion, Philip?" said Miss Harriet, and he said no, he was quite comfortable, and then he asked her what she considered the greatest thing in the world.

She thought for a minute and then she said, "Well, Philip, it seems to me that the two greatest things in the world are love and trust. They go hand in hand, or should, and of the two love is stronger. These two things will keep a whole life sweet and wholesome, and there is no happiness without them. Sometimes there is a nature so strong and valiant," and she looked hard at Dr. Phil, "that it always looks towards truth and cannot be blinded by circumstance or outside influence. A nature like this, as it is strong, should be merciful." She paused a minute. "All natures are not so strong. Some of us are weak. Even where we love most we cannot always see the truth clearly. I am speaking of woman nature, Philip.

"Trust is something we must learn, and when our doubts are once removed, that trust goes unswerving and faithful to the end. It takes a brave woman, Philip, to give up love and happiness for a principle. It takes a brave, noble-spirited girl to martyr her own heart by

renouncing the man she loves when she has been led to believe him in the wrong. A weak, shallow woman would close her eyes to his error." She paused again, and still Dr. Phil said nothing.

"Is it, then," she continued in a low voice, "an unpardonable offense when a high-spirited girl makes the mistake of misjudging? We all make mistakes, Philip."

I never heard Miss Harriet talk like that before. I could n't understand it all clearly, but she looked so good, and earnest, and beautiful, that I just sat listening with my mouth open, and Dr. Phil raised himself up on his elbow and looked like he was drinking in every word.

When she stopped he drew a long breath and said, "I never thought of it in just that light before. It seemed to me that trust must go with love, if it was the right — the real — kind of love. But — perhaps — " He broke off and seemed to be thinking hard.

"There now!" said Miss Harriet brightly, "I 'm getting to be a regular preacher. But just take this bit of experience to heart — and remember it, if the occasion comes. I once knew a woman who spent twenty-five unhappy years because she judged a friend too quickly and then forgave too slowly. And, Philip, I forgot to add," and she smiled in the prettiest and cheeriest kind of way, "that another one of the greatest things in the world is to be — young, to have the chance of setting right mistakes youth cannot help but make, because it is — youth."

I looked at Dr. Phil, and it seemed to me his eyes

were moist. He had reached out for Miss Harriet's hand and was stroking it between his own, and he had a miserable, boyish look that I have sometimes seen in Billy's eyes when he was troubled. I never knew before that Dr. Phil could look so young.

"I wonder if it 's too late," he said, almost under his breath.

Miss Harriet laughed cheerfully and said, "Too late! Why, my dear boy, there 's no such word — when you are twenty-five!"

Just then someone whistled at the gate. It was father, on his way home.

"Come along with me, you young gad-about!" he called to me, and we all joined him, Miss Harriet walking with us part of the way down the road. My head was full of what Miss Harriet had been saying.

"Father, what do *you* think is the greatest thing in the world?" I asked, without stopping to remember that I was interrupting.

He looked at me a moment just as Miss Harriet had looked at Dr. Phil, only I thought at first he was going to say something in the way he does when he 's laughing at things, but he did n't. He took my hand, and said in the beautiful, grave voice which he only uses when he 's very serious, "The greatest thing in the world is — love. It is stronger than fear or distrust, stronger than hate, stronger than life — or death."

For a moment nobody said anything. It was just the time of day when the sun has gone, but it is n't dark — when there 's a soft, purplish haze over everything.

There was still a little glow of yellow-pink in the west, and a tiny, white new moon, and one big star.

We walked along slowly for a few minutes, and then Dr. Phil surprised us all by saying suddenly, in a brisk, business-like way, "I 'm going to Sulphur Springs to-morrow. I 'm going to bring Katherine back — if I can."

Father and Miss Harriet smiled with sympathy, and I don't know what possessed me to act that way and say such a thing, but I was so glad that I just jumped from one foot to the other like a perfect kid and cried out, "Oh goody! Please let me go! Take me with you, Dr. Phil!" Now was n't that silly?

Father spoke up in his funny way, saying, "Why, Bea, I 'm astonished at your lack of worldly wisdom! Your education has been neglected, my child. Don't you know that when young men go a-courtin' their lady-loves they don't carry along other young ladies? — or anybody else, for that matter. Just ask your Aunt Lou, and she 'll tell you that it simply is n't done."

"She may go if she wants to," said Dr. Phil quickly, putting his arm around me. "That is, Colonel, if you and her aunt do not mind. Bea has been my stanch little partner straight through everything, and if she wants to go with me, I 'm glad to have her. She 's helped me before; maybe she 'll help me out now."

And when father laughed and said he was sure he did n't mind and that he guessed he could stand it if Dr. Phil and Katherine could, well, I was so happy that I felt real foolish.

CHAPTER XXVIII

An Expedition in Quest of a Sweetheart

That night Dr. Phil called to see Uncle George and Aunt Lou and had quite a long talk with them. The twins told me about it afterwards. They were crazy to hear what was being said, but Aunt Lou sent them upstairs, and they could only guess at things. They thought it was about Katherine, but they didn't even know, until we all came back, that Dr. Phil was going to take me with him. And it was a good thing too. They would have been sure to want to go, and the bravest man living wouldn't want to take *three* other people along when he went courting.

It was a lovely trip. When you reach the little Sulphur Springs station you have to drive about two miles through the woods before you get to the Springs and The Inn. It wasn't new to me because I had been there before, and all along the uneven mountain road I was pointing out things to Dr. Phil and talking to the hack driver, Mr. Bell, who remembered me and asked all about father.

"If you follow that," I said, pointing out a shady little wood road, "you'll get to the Browns' house. They've lived here for always, and have a lovely, big farmhouse, and lots of fields and orchards, and they sell

I stopped dead short, for somebody was sitting alone under an oak — a little somebody in a white dress, with a book half falling out of her hand. *See page* 303

their fruit and butter and things over at The Inn. And right over there, there 's a tall rock peak called Eagle Point, where you climb by ladders to the top, and then you can see for miles and miles around."

I showed him the little path that led to a country school, and another that led to a big pool where the people from The Inn often went in bathing. Just after we got inside of the hotel grounds I was about to point out a big oak, where I had once nearly caught a baby squirrel, when I stopped dead short, for somebody was sitting alone under the oak — a little somebody in a white dress, with a book half falling out of her hand as if she did n't care whether she read or not, and who did n't even turn her head to see the hack pass, but was looking far off in a tired, indifferent way, and the little somebody was Katherine!

I could n't possibly keep quiet.

"Katherine! Katherine!" I screamed, waving my hand, and Dr. Phil told Mr. Bell he could let us out right there. I went flying up to Katherine, and was hugging her with all my might as Dr. Phil came up. She had jumped up from the bench and stood still, too surprised to speak, with the pink coming and going in her lovely little face. I had never seen Katherine's face look so small and so much like a flower. She glanced up at Dr. Phil, and her blue eyes looked frightened, and hurt, and asking questions, and begging pardon all at once.

He looked at her just one second, and then he did a scandalous thing! He took *both* of us in his arms and hugged us so tight it took my breath away — in the broad

daylight, with people looking! I guess he forgot he was hugging me too.

Katherine's eyes were wet like violets in a bowl as she said, "And you forgive me, Philip?"

And he answered, "Forgive you, darling! The question is can you forgive *me* for being such a stubborn, conceited idiot!" And he hugged us still tighter.

There was a group of people not far away, staring at us like anything, but Katherine and Dr. Phil seemed to have forgotten anybody else was living. I thought of what father said about young men going a-courting, so when Katherine finally laughed and pulled away, saying, "Good gracious! We are making a sensation, Philip!" and they sat down very close together on the bench, why I just slipped away, saying I was going up to see Mrs. Reid, the lady who kept the hotel.

And I don't think they minded.

CHAPTER XXIX

What Old Man Bennet Was Looking For

After all this it would seem that there was n't another single thing left to happen, either in our family or in all Pine Grove, and that I had at last reached the place where I ought to say " and they all lived happily ever afterwards." For everything had turned out in the best kind of way. Father and Uncle George were friends again, and our families were so intimate, running back and forth across the Pasture to see each other every day, that Pine Grove was buzzing with talk about us just as if we had made a scandal.

Dr. Phil and Katherine were going to be married right after Thanksgiving. The one thing that troubled me was about them. Speaking of Dr. Phil, Aunt Em said one day to father, " He ought not to be wasting his talents here, Will. There is so little advancement for a country doctor — "

" Country doctor! " father exclaimed. " Why, Philip is n't thinking of any such thing. He 's already climbed the first few rungs on his ladder to success in Bradford. They think the world of him at Elkhurst Hospital. Philip has been very modest and reticent about himself, but I 've been hearing things about him, not only through John Willingham, but from people in Bradford. From

what I hear, even if he wanted to be a country doctor, old Elkhurst would n't let him. He only came here to rest and recuperate from overwork, at Elkhurst's express orders. St. John 's too capable a fellow for a little village like this, where everybody 's so bloomin' healthy."

I felt as if the bottom had dropped out of things. "Won't he and Katherine live here when they are married, then?" I asked.

Father and Aunt Em both laughed at my face. "Don't look so tragic, Bea," said father. "Dr. St. John says they are going to have a summer home here, but they 'll live most of the year in Bradford of course." I felt very bad about it until I talked to Dr. Phil and Katherine, and they told me they were going to have me come to see them, oh often and often, and how I 'd spend Saturdays with them, and what lovely times we 'd have going to places, and then I felt better.

Doctor and Miss Harriet were going to be married, too, the next spring. Billy and I found it out by hearing things said, a bit here and a bit there. Mrs. McDade was happy as she could be, going to the Charity Association, and visiting with people, and bringing up the little adopted Flannigans — she had changed their name to McDade — and losing fat, and getting her liver like it ought to be.

Selmer and Pauline were doing well. Pauline had written to Mrs. McDade again and told her that Old Man Bennet was living with them and that he treated her very kindly. When I heard that, I told Aunt Em that Mr. Bennet might not be such a bad old man after all,

and she said he was probably like everybody else, part good and part bad, and that nobody was all good or all bad, that the very best people had their faults and the very worst had their good traits. Miss Harriet added that she had heard he was often good to Pauline, that he had been known to give her medicines she needed out of the drug-store, and nourishing drinks like chocolate and milk, without charging her for them.

Anyway, good or bad, he was gone and would n't keep us stirred up any more. And Mr. Hitchett, who had been very sick with malarial fever, was getting well again. And the Pasture had been turned into a nice, friendly pasture, instead of being a shut-up spite place, for our cows and Uncle George's grazed there now, and it was getting to be such a popular place with both our families that Grouchy had got disgusted and gone somewhere else to live. And the rock-pile with the cave beneath was waiting for the workmen to come and make our fortune. Well, as I said, *after all this,* it is amazing that anything else could happen, that the very strangest thing of all should happen.

It began with the afternoon Dr. Phil came in and asked father if he might borrow grandfather Crawford's old arm-chair, which was in the barn loft, for Mr. Hitchett. There was no large easy-chair at the Hitchetts' which would be comfortable for Mr. Hitchett to use; he was just able to sit up a little, but still very weak; and Dr. Phil had thought of grandfather's old chair and decided that it would be the very thing, if father did n't object.

"If it 's a little wobbly, I can make it tight and strong, Colonel, if you don't mind my style of mending," he said.

Of course father said he 'd be only too glad to let Mr. Hitchett use the chair.

"It used to be one of the most comfortable chairs to lounge in I ever saw," said father. "It was always a great favorite with my father, and he kept it in his bedroom. I think it is strong enough, with a little tightening, but the upholstering is much worn, and we 'll have to get Em to sew a cover of some kind on it. We 'll go out to the barn now and see if it will do."

Billy and I followed them, of course, and when the old chair was pulled out clear of the rubbish and dusted, it was n't so bad after all. "Just the thing for an invalid, big, and broad, and fits the curve of the back. Let 's see if the legs need tightening," said Dr. Phil. They turned the chair over on its side and examined all the legs, and they seemed tight and sound. Just below the seat there was a little panel of wood about an inch deep that ran all around. While Dr. Phil was pounding here and there to see if it felt strong, he happened to press against that strip of panel, and to everybody's amazement the strip sank in and a little shallow drawer slid out at the opposite side.

Dr. Phil stopped and whistled in surprise, and father said, "Well I 'll be everlastingly blessed!"

"You did n't know it was there?" asked Dr. Phil.

"Never!" answered father.

They set the chair upright and then slid the drawer all the way out. There was no way on earth you could

have told it was a drawer — no handles, no keyhole, no knobs or anything, just plain, smooth wood. But if you pushed the panel in, at either the front or the back of the chair, the drawer would slide out at the opposite side; and you had to push pretty hard, it did n't slide open just from tilting the chair or moving it about, so it was no wonder no one had ever discovered it.

There were several old, yellow papers in the drawer, but only one that father was greatly interested in, and that was a long, narrow envelope with a few words written on it. Father stared and stared at the envelope, and then without a word held it out for Dr. Phil to see, and Dr. Phil stared too, and a strange look came into his face, as if he had found out something.

"Colonel, this is going to clear up a lot of things, I believe," he said.

For answer father said, "Look at that date, Philip!"

"July the twentieth, eighteen eighty-five," read Dr. Phil.

Then Billy and I stared at each other. We knew that date by heart, just as we knew that in 1492 Columbus discovered America. It was the day grandfather was killed!

"I must see George at once," said father. "Come on, Philip." They had both forgotten all about Mr. Hitchett and Billy and me.

"Uncle George is in the Pasture, I saw him there. I 'll run and get him," offered Billy. But father said no, I 'd better go, because he did n't want Billy to be running yet with that arm of his.

"Light out and hit the highway, Bea," he said.

And I lit out and hit it. I was back with Uncle George in a jiffy. On the way I told him about the secret drawer and the paper with July the twentieth, eighteen eighty-five on it, and he was certainly an astonished man. As we came through the yard Aunt Sally called to us and said father and Dr. Phil had gone into the house.

We found them in the library with Aunt Em, and when we came in father just handed the envelope to Uncle George, who said, "A secret drawer in the old chair! Bea's been telling me. Who'd have thought it!" And then he looked at the envelope and did just what father and Dr. Phil had done — he stared.

"Well!" he then exclaimed. "On the day he was killed — and after all these years to find it!"

By that time I could n't stand it any longer. I was simply dying to know what was on that envelope, so I said, "Father, *can't* Billy and I see what 's on it?"

I guess my voice must have sounded very anxious and ridiculous, because they all laughed a little, and father said, "Why yes, you little Eve, there 's no reason why you should n't." And he held the envelope down where we could see, and there, written in an old-fashioned hand and pale-brown ink, were these words, "Last will and testament of James Lee Crawford. July the twentieth, eighteen eighty-five."

Aunt Em and Dr. Phil were looking grave, and a little uneasy, until father said, "George, before we open this paper I want to tell you that, if father has left the Middle Pasture to you, I shan't mind one bit. It 'll not make one iota of difference in my feeling for you."

"And it 's just the same with me, Will," said Uncle George. "If he 's left it to you, it 's all right. We 've had enough of foolish quarreling. We won't let any matter of a bit of land — or mica either — come between us again."

"Now that you 've both spoken, I 'll have my say," said Aunt Em in her that-settles-it way. "The sensible thing for you two to do is to agree, before the will is opened, to share the Pasture equally, no matter which of you he may have left it to. That 's the fair thing to do."

Father and Uncle George at once agreed to this; then father said, "And now suppose we appoint Dr. St. John to open and read aloud that document, while we seat ourselves and listen as proper families should, who have wills to be read."

We all sat down then, and Dr. Phil stood up by the table in a business-like way. He opened the envelope, and drew out a long, yellow paper, and began to read. It started off something like this: "I, James Lee Crawford, being of sound mind, do hereby give and bequeath," and then it went on saying how father was to have certain lands and properties and Uncle George was to have others, and how the store buildings in Bradford were to go, one to father, one to Uncle George, and one to Aunt Em, and various fields and tenant houses were mentioned. None of this very specially interested anybody, because grandfather had made all that clear before he died, and given the property in just that way. But when Dr. Phil got to a place that began, "And that section

of land known as the Middle Pasture, which lies," and then a lot of description about the number of rods on this side and that side — much like you bound a state in geography — when he started that paragraph, we all got very wide awake indeed.

Dr. Phil paused just a minute, and his face had a strange look of wonder and astonishment. Then he read slowly and distinctly, "That section, known as the Middle Pasture, I hereby give and bequeath to my esteemed friend, *Harriet Byrd.*" He stopped, and everybody sat straight up, it was such a shock. Dr. Phil read on. "Out of consideration of the fact that her father was my devoted friend, and furthermore out of consideration of the fact that in the year 1847 — June the eighteenth — my father, William George Crawford, bought from Harriet Byrd's father, Henry Proctor Byrd, a large tract of land, including the site of my present home, at a price far below its real value, the contract being made to accommodate Byrd in a financial difficulty. While I impose no legal conditions or reservations with this bequest, at the same time it is my wish that if Harriet Byrd should at any time desire to sell or lease this property, she will give first option to my sons, George and William Crawford, or their heirs. Signed, James Lee Crawford. Witnessed by Jacob Selmer Bennet, William Philip Burke."

By this time I was so mixed up in my feelings I did n't know what to do, and they all looked dazed. Then Aunt Em said, "Well! That settles it!" and I never saw her mouth snap shut so tight. You could n't tell whether

she was glad or sorry, from the way she looked. Father's eyes had already begun to wrinkle at the corners, and now he just laughed like it was a big joke and said, "What everlasting fools we 've been, George! Fighting and haggling over that land for nearly twenty years, when all the time it belonged to Harriet. And by heaven, I 'm glad of it! I 'm glad it 's hers."

Quick as a flash Uncle George caught father's hand. "Shake on it, Will," he said. "Honest, I 'm glad too! We are all well fixed, you and I and Em, and Harriet 's had a struggle of it ever since her father died. Father was right. Part of our land ought to be hers." And they kept shaking hands and laughing like great big happy boys, instead of being sorry they had lost the Pasture. But I had an idea that what they were feeling happy about mostly was just being friends again; for I have heard Aunt Sally say that before the quarrel father and Uncle George had been perfectly devoted to each other, that they went everywhere together and planned their crops and their business together, and when they were young, like Billy and myself, one was just lost without the other. So it must have gone pretty hard with them to quarrel as they did and keep it up so many years. I heard a funny little sound from 'Aunt Em's direction, and when I looked, there she was with her head down on the table — crying. Aunt Em crying!

All my feelings went upside down again, and when I looked at Billy for help, he was looking as helpless as a baby himself. But father and Uncle George were by her side in a minute, with their arms around her, and

she raised her head, and laughed while she was crying, and said, "I 'm all right. There 's nothing the matter. I was just so glad — so glad — not only about Harriet, but — everything!" Then she looked at Uncle George and said fiercely, while she wiped her eyes, "George, you go home and bring every one of 'em over here for supper — twins and all. Billy, you go and tell Sally to kill four chickens. Bea, go over to the drug-store and tell 'em to reserve me a gallon of ice-cream as soon as it gets here from Bradford, and tell 'em to send it over in time for supper!"

Aunt Em is one of those people who never waste much time in being sentimental. I ran to the drug-store and back in very short time, for there were too many interesting things happening at home for me to be away any more than I could help.

When I got back, father and Dr. Phil and Billy were on the porch. Father was saying, "But, Philip, why do you think it was the will Bennet was after? And what could be his motive in keeping secret the fact that father had made a will? How could it concern him personally? I can't see head nor tail to it all."

"Neither could I at first, Colonel. It was a mystery to me for a long time. But it 's been growing clearer ever since Bennet was taken sick. You know he talked wildly when his fever was high, and some of the things he said — snatches of sentences though they were — helped clear things up for me, though they seemed a senseless jumble to Mrs. Jones. You see, Colonel, I had been studying the case. I had heard things about

the ghost over here. Delia told me things — you know how negroes talk — and she had been regaled with many details by Aunt Sally."

I was glad he did n't tell father that I told him things too.

"It excited my curiosity and interest; a mystery of any kind always appealed to me. So I got Doctor to tell me a bit of your family history. No offense, Colonel." Father smiled and made a little gesture with his hands, as much as to say his family history was open to anyone.

Of course it was. I don't suppose there ever were any people better than the Crawfords, to hear Aunt Em talk; unless it was the Dixons, to hear Aunt Lou talk.

"And going about the country among the old residents, on business for Uncle John, I 'd strike up with a bit of information here and there. You know these old-timers love to talk about things of their day. And so, putting two and two together, I learned a number of things which naturally had not come to the notice of yourself or your brother. People who are talked about, you know, are always the very last to hear of it. Sometimes they never know it at all. And it seems that after the sudden death of your father and Burke, the lawyer, there were stories going about. People wondered why your father was closeted with Burke and Bennet in the library just before the tragedy. They would n't have thought so much of it if Bennet had n't appeared so reluctant to talk. He always pretended to forget exactly what happened in the half hour previous to your

father's death. You and your family, in the horror and shock brought upon you, failed to note or speculate upon minor details."

"Perhaps that's true. I never thought of anything of importance having taken place in the hour between dinner and the time father was killed," said father thoughtfully.

Dr. Phil continued, "The afternoon Bennet called here — you were away at the time — when Billy innocently insisted on knowing why his grandfather went upstairs immediately before he was killed by the bolt, and Bennet was so plainly disconcerted by the question, and Miss Harriet was so evidently disturbed and unhappy, well, all of that set me thinking and putting two and two together again."

"But why should Harriet be disturbed? Do you suppose she knew anything of father's intentions?" asked father.

Dr. Phil said no, he didn't think so, but there was something sinister. Bennet's presence seemed to make her ill.

"And that brought a new factor in the case," he said. "The more I thought about it, the more I was satisfied that the ghostly visitations were in some way connected with something that took place on the day of your father's death. When I came in from Mrs. McDade's and found Bennet here spending the night, I suspected that he had some ulterior object in coming, and stayed awake to watch him. I was satisfied that he was planning a midnight visit to your father's room. Well, the

hypothesis I formed was that he knew of some secret paper which, if discovered by you, would be of great disadvantage to your brother George, since I could in no way connect him with an interest in your family's financial matters, except through the fact that he expected his son to marry Katherine."

"Yes, I've since thought of that," said father, "but it seemed a rather far-fetched motive to lead him into taking such risks, for so many years too. Bennet's a man of means. It doesn't seem credible that a financial disadvantage to George would induce such dangerous persistence."

"That's so, Colonel; that very point bothered me quite a little. Then I came across a clew. I heard that he had, in their youth, been in love with Miss Harriet. It seems that in those days she was engaged to Uncle John, and they were expecting to marry, when Bennet by some means poisoned her mind against him, and she broke the engagement. Then Uncle John, in a fit of pique, married — Aunt Fanny."

"Phew!" father whistled. "That accounts for — Mrs. Willingham!"

"Yes, that accounts," said Dr. Phil. "Bennet then thought he had clear sailing, and when Miss Harriet turned him down flat, he never forgave her. His love turned to hatred, and when that will was made and then lost, he saw his chance to deprive her of her inheritance and snatched at it."

Father said he was beginning to see, and Dr. Phil went

on, "I think your father must have intended all along to make such a will."

"Yes, I 'm sure he did," interrupted father, "and put it off from time to time, as people will do about three things — making wills, paying bills, and going to dentists." Father was obliged to have his joke. "I can remember, now, little things he said, at one time or another, which we then attached no significance to, but which I now understand better. But go on, Philip, and let 's see how you worked it out."

"Well, your father's friend Burke, as you know, was having dinner with him; so when Bennet happened in, it struck your father as an opportune moment for writing his will, having a lawyer and another witness at hand. So after dinner the three went quietly into the library and got the matter all done. When the will was finished, your father carried it up to his bedroom, where he must have kept some of his private papers."

"Yes, he often did that," again father interrupted. "I 'm sure he did n't intend to conceal the will for any length of time. He would often keep things of value in his room, and I realize now that he must have used the secret drawer in that chair as a temporary place of safety for money or important papers. I think my mother must have known the secret of the chair, but none of the rest of us guessed it."

"That must have been just the way of it," Dr. Phil went on. "He put the will in that drawer and then returned immediately to the others downstairs. Of course Bennet knew the Pasture had been left to Miss Harriet

and that your father had gone to his room to put the will away. When weeks passed after your father's death, and nothing had been made known concerning the will, he jumped at once at the truth of the matter — that your father had concealed the paper so well it had not been found, and that you and your brother, knowing nothing of a will, were making no search for one. Hence his sudden interest in buying old furniture. You remember he made you several offers for the old set in your father's room." Father nodded.

"Failing to get hold of the old furniture, in some piece of which he was reasonably sure the paper was hidden, he began his nocturnal visits. He evidently knew that he and Burke were the only persons knowing your father's intentions in regard to the Pasture — it is possible your father may have mentioned to them the fact that he had not spoken of this to you and your brother; so, when your father and Burke were killed, Bennet realized that he was absolutely safe in withholding his knowledge of the will and determined to kill two birds with one stone. He was actuated by two strong motives, greed and revenge, and as you know, Colonel, there is scarcely a stronger motive than the latter. By finding and destroying the will he would not only insure a chance of Selmer's acquiring, through Katherine, an eventual share of the Middle Pasture property, which he may or may not have guessed contained undiscovered wealth, but more than that, and the vital motive through it all, he would have the satisfaction of depriving Miss Harriet of her rights and of keeping her in a state of poverty.

People who have long known Bennet have told me that he never forgave a fancied injury, and in his dealings he was very often actuated by a spirit of revenge."

"Yes, he has that reputation," said father, "and I have frequently wondered at certain peculiar actions of his since my father's death, but I must confess that all that labyrinth of chicanery is something I never dreamed of. It 's wonderful, Philip, how you worked out your deductions."

"Not a bit," answered Dr. Phil. "Bea and Billy helped me; and you know, when those two get going, something usually happens."

Billy and I had kept very quiet, but now I giggled, and he grinned, and father gravely nodded his head.

Dr. Phil continued, "And I was enlightened quite a bit by the country gossip, and still more by Bennet's ramblings when he was out of his head. I 'm inclined to think the secret of the mica was entirely unsuspected, though it is barely possible Bennet knew of something. He spoke of the rocks once in his delirium. But on the point of that discovery Billy and Bea may take every grain of credit to themselves. Not another soul did a thing."

"No, by George! They did n't leave anything for anyone else to do!" father said rather forcibly, so I thought I 'd change the subject.

"Won't Miss Harriet and Doctor be astonished, though, when we tell them all about it to-night," I said, and Billy added, "Gee! I 'd love to hear what Aunt Lou says when Uncle George tells her."

"It 'll be a-plenty," said Aunt Em, who had come out when Dr. Phil first began to talk.

It was very funny the way different people took the news. Pine Grove had another chance to buzz, and it buzzed.

The twins told me it made quite a stir at their house. Carey said, "It struck us like a bomb-proof out of a clear sky. Mother nearly had a fit. She was perfectly contracted about it, and she said it was a shame, and she would n't have thought it of Miss Harriet. But father and Katherine finally got her to see that it was n't Miss Harriet's fault at all."

Mary said she did n't care who the old Pasture belonged to, so long as we could play in it all we pleased, and she knew Miss Harriet would let us. That was pretty much the way I felt, so long as somebody owned it who was one of us, and of course Miss Harriet would be in the family when she married Doctor, and Dr. Phil married Katherine. That would make us all kin.

When Miss Harriet was told she said at first, flat-footed, she would n't take it, and Aunt Lou looked hopeful. But father and Uncle George laughed and told her she had no choice, it had already been hers for nearly twenty years. Then she asked Doctor what he thought about it, and he said he thought, so long as grandfather had wanted her to have it, and so long as father and Uncle George felt the same way, she ought to accept grandfather's gift of the Pasture in the kindly spirit in which it was given. "But as to the treasure found on the land," he added, "that is quite another matter. I

don't believe Mr. Crawford suspected that rock mound of containing anything valuable. He could n't have known it. It does n't stand to reason that he would have willed away from his sons the most valuable portion of his estate. My idea of the right of it, Harriet, is that the land belongs to you, but that George and Will should own mineral rights, and that the find at the rock-pile is rightfully theirs to operate and to realize upon. Since you ask me, that is what looks right and fair to me."

Miss Harriet finally agreed and said she 'd accept the Pasture on condition that father and Uncle George had their rights, and then father and Uncle George insisted that Miss Harriet ought to own one-third of the mineral rights, and so that 's the way it was all settled. The rock-pile belonged to all three of them, but Miss Harriet owned the Pasture.

"What are you going to do with it, Miss Harriet?" I asked.

And she said, "Why, bless you, child, it will be used just as it is now. I guess we 'll have to fence in the 'mica works' part, but the rest of it will still be the Middle Pasture, and we 'll all three turn our stock in to graze. I 'll have cows, now that I have a place to keep them, and other stock too. I 've always wanted them. And you children will play in the Branch and under the chestnuts, just as you always have done."

That was good news to us. And so the story of the Pasture is all finished, but I ought to say that I never could have got all the long, hard words which father

and Doctor and Dr. Phil used, written down right, if father had n't helped me about it.

The day before Katherine was married, Thanksgiving Day it was, they were all at our house for dinner: Uncle George, cheerful and full of jokes; Aunt Lou, if not exactly cheerful, resigned at least; Katherine, like a rose with the dew on; and Miss Harriet, very nearly as pretty; and the twins, in new plaid dresses; and Doctor, seeming almost strong and well; and Dr. Phil, so handsome and entertaining that I could just imagine how proud Katherine must feel. And as if that was n't enough of us, who must Aunt Em have but Mrs. McDade and her adopted babies! And if Mrs. McDade was n't the happiest and proudest one in that whole crowd, she certainly looked it, anyway. She laughed and talked so, and had such a good time, that she made every one of us feel glad she came.

In the kitchen Mandy and Delia and Becky were all helping Aunt Sally. I 'd like to tell about that Thanksgiving dinner, but I just can't. There are no words for it. I can only say that Aunt Em and Aunt Sally were busy for days beforehand, and Eli had so much to do, killing ducks and chickens and turkeys and grinding mince-meat, that father had to bring in another man to do the barn work.

When the last one had driven away, we were all standing on the front steps where we had been saying good-by. The sun was setting, and the red and gold in the west matched the red and yellow of the trees, for we were

not into winter yet. It was all so beautiful that you could n't help feeling that everything in the whole world was just exactly right.

I tried to tell father how I felt about it, but something felt tight in my throat, and I could only look at him, and Aunt Em, and Billy, and feel glad — glad — glad.

THE END